

DIFFICULT
" SAYINGS OF JESUS

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by

George
Gordon Powell, 1911-
"

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This book is published in England under the title *New Solutions to Difficult Sayings of Jesus*.

DEDICATED
to
my former Professors in Ormond College,
Melbourne University,

JOHN GILLIES, M.A., B.D.

HECTOR MACLEAN, M.A., M.SC., D.D.

FREDERICK OXER, M.A., B.D.

who opened the Scriptures and helped me to see
that Faith and Reason walk together.

Introduction

"If thy right hand offend thee cut it off," Jesus said. Again He said, "If any man hate not his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple . . . If ye have faith ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence . . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man ye have no life in you."

What did He mean by these sayings and others equally difficult?

I have quoted these texts from the Authorized Version of the Bible. Since that beloved translation was made there have been several interesting developments all helping towards a better understanding of obscure passages of Scripture.

In the past three and a half centuries researchers have discovered many ancient manuscripts of the Bible in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and other languages. These manuscripts were not available to the translators of the King James version.

Again, in comparatively recent years it has been possible to make a study of the Aramaic dialect spoken by Jesus and to understand the thought-forms He used.

Archaeologists have uncovered many ancient sites and relics which throw light on strange references in Scripture.

Furthermore, scholars have brought home to us the

considerable changes in meaning many English words have suffered since Shakespeare's time.

Translators of the Scriptures working in our own day, and in particular those who gave us the Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible, have done us a great service by incorporating these new insights.

With this kind of assistance we turn with fresh interest to the difficult sayings of Jesus and, as we do so, the worst problems dissolve away. Not only that, but we discover that these strange expressions enshrine truths of the utmost importance for a rich and full spiritual life.

The following chapters were originally produced in sermon form for the Sunday and Wednesday congregations at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Macquarie Street, Sydney, Australia. In the past ten years I have delivered several series of addresses, but none of them stirred such phenomenal interest as these on the "Difficult Sayings". Well over a thousand people packed the Church itself, especially on Wednesdays. At the lunch-hour services the hall below was regularly needed in addition for unusually large overflow congregations. Because of this interest I am currently engaged in preparing a second series of addresses on other difficult sayings of Jesus.

I am grateful to those who sent in texts for discussion and to others who have assisted in various ways, especially some who made decisions at Billy Graham's Australian Crusade and whose testimonies are recorded in the last chapter. In the same chapter I have quoted an extract from Stanley Jones' book, *Conversion* (published by Hodder and Stoughton). Once more I have used several illustrations from the writings of Norman Vincent Peale

in whose New York pulpit I recently had the privilege of preaching. My gratitude also goes to Mrs. M. Drew for typing the manuscript and to my wife for many valuable suggestions.

We send this book out with the prayer that God will use it to remove stumbling blocks to faith for many a reader. Through a true understanding of Scripture may we all enter more fully into that life to which He calls us, a life of Christian faith, fellowship and service. So will we know the blessing of integrated personalities in which are found His love, power, joy and peace.

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CHAPTER ONE

If Thy Hand Offend Thee, Cut it Off

Did Jesus mean us to take Him literally when He said, (Matthew 5:30) "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off?" There is on record the case of a young man who thought so and who amputated his own hand with an axe.

Fortunately such cases are extremely rare, but how many of us pause to consider what Jesus really meant? He was using a local idiom which is not only strange, but in its literal meaning repulsive to our modern minds.

THE IDIOM

The word "idiom" as defined in the Oxford Dictionary is "a form of expression peculiar to a language". Every language has such expressions and English is no exception. Indeed we have many idioms relating to the hands. If we tried to apply them literally we would soon be in a hopeless situation. I have made up an imaginary story employing a dozen English idioms of this kind;

"Mr. Smith had a daughter who was very irresponsible and because he tried to rule her with an iron hand, she thought he was high-handed. Her behaviour was really out of hand. However, Mr. Smith had in his business a young man named Mr. Brown who was his right hand. Mr. Brown owned an old car. Some people described

it as second-hand, but in fact it had passed through many hands. Mr. Brown admitted that it had changed hands frequently. One day young Mr. Brown, in what appeared an off-hand manner, asked Mr. Smith to give him his daughter's hand in marriage. On their honeymoon they played in a tennis tournament. Having kept their hands in at the game they won hands down. When they settled in their own home Mr. Brown proved himself handy at carpentry and often lent a hand to his wife as she did the housework. Their old car was on their hands for years."

Now read that story again and try to picture everything happening quite literally. The exercise can be quite entertaining. When Jesus said, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off," He said it at the same time that He said, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out." Again He was using an idiom which was perfectly understandable to His hearers, though revolting to us. Some of our expressions involving eyes must be just as revolting to a foreigner learning our language and meeting these idioms for the first time. We might add a chapter to the story of the courtship between Mr. Brown and Miss Smith along these lines:—

"Any one with half an eye could see that Mr. Brown had an eye for pretty girls. He used to make eyes at Miss Smith who was all eyes for him. In fact she couldn't take her eyes off him. On his part he thought she was quite an eyeful. One day she said she could not meet him because she was up to her eyes in work. He decided to keep an eye on her because he knew this was all my eye."

There were idioms in the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, idioms which involved the use of the hands and the eyes and which are strange to us, but quite as familiar to the people in Palestine one thousand nine hundred years ago as any of the expressions in the above story are to English-speaking people today.

The story of Dr. George Lamsa, a modern Assyrian, who grew up in a kind of Shangri-la valley in Kurdistan, fascinates me. The people had lived in this self-contained fastness for over two thousand years preserving the customs and the language of the days of Jesus. There being practically no contacts with the outside world, Dr. Lamsa claims that he and his people would understand Jesus perfectly were He to return to this earth tomorrow and speak exactly the same words in the same idiom that He used among the Galileans long ago. He says that his people still use the expression, "Cut off your hand," meaning "Stop doing something." When they say, "Cut off your hand from my vineyard," they mean "Do not gather my grapes." To say a man's hand is too long means he is a thief. "Shorten your hand" means "Do not steal." "Cut your hand" often means simply, "Cut out a bad habit."

While there are obviously several shades of meaning to the idiom, it is quite clear that Jesus had no intention that we should take the words literally when He said, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." The lesson He did intend to convey, and surely a most important lesson is this; the Church and the individual Christian must be on the watch all the time to exercise self-discipline, to eliminate whatever is evil on the principle that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Let us then apply this truth to the Church.

THE CHURCH

When Mark recorded the statement of Jesus about cutting off the right hand he made it follow the warning about offences to little ones. (Mark 9:42). The New English Bible translates the verse in question,

“As for the man who leads astray one of these little ones who have faith, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round his neck. If your hand is your undoing, cut it off . . .”

Earlier in the chapter Mark has described how Jesus took a child and set him in the midst. I don't think there is any doubt that Jesus gave the strongest possible warning against any injury to a child, spiritual, moral, mental, or physical. Today we realise all too well the fearful harm which can be done children at the emotional level. Nerve trouble may result years later when the child has become an adult. While all that is true, The New English Bible makes it clear that Jesus also had in mind those who were babes in the faith. It is a dreadful thing to interfere with the faith of those who have only recently become Christian believers and who are still feeling their way. Those who hurt that faith will have to answer to God Himself and Jesus used the strongest possible language to make men understand that the punishment would be terrible.

If then our text applies to the Church, what is the Church to do with a man who sins in this way? In the fifth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians we have a reference to one of the earliest cases on record. The young Church in Corinth was battling for survival in a

city which was notoriously rich and worldly. In particular, loose standards in sexual morality prevailed and this evil had even appeared in the Church itself. Paul refers specifically to a man who had committed sin with his own step-mother. Such were the low moral standards of the day that the Church allowed him to stay on as a member, apparently taking the view that Christians ought to be forgiving. That was not Paul's view. This is what he wrote to them as translated in The New English Bible:—

“A man who has done such a deed should be rooted out of your company . . . Have you never heard the saying, A little leaven leavens all the dough? The old leaven of corruption is working among you . . . In my letter I wrote that you must have nothing to do with loose livers. I was not, of course, referring to pagans who lead loose lives, or are grabbers and swindlers or idolators. To avoid them you would have to get right out of the world. I now write that you must have nothing to do with any so-called Christian who leads a loose life, or is grasping, or idolatrous, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler. You should not even eat with any such person . . . God is their judge. You are judges within the fellowship. Root out the evil-doer from your community.”

All that seems severe, but is it any more severe than the circumstances demanded, and is it not in line with what Jesus said, “If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off?” We like to think there was a happy ending to this story. In the second chapter of the second epistle, Paul writes (verse 7).

“Something very different is called for now: you must forgive the offender and put heart into him; the man’s sorrow must not be made so severe as to overwhelm him.”

It would appear that the sinner had repented of his sin. In that case it was the duty of the Church to forgive, but until he repented his influence would be evil (like the bad leaven in the lump) and his example was likely to drag down others, especially “babes in the faith”.

Peter was to Jesus His right hand, but there was at least one occasion when Jesus said to him, “Get thee behind me Satan.” (Matthew XVI;23.) The New English Bible continues:

“You are a stumbling block to me. You think as men think, not as God thinks.”

If Jesus had to cut Himself off from His best friend when he was tempting Him to take the line of least resistance and to fail in His high moral and spiritual duty, how much more should we be ready to cut off every weakening and evil influence in our lives? If it is true of the Church, it is certainly true of every individual Christian.

THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN

When I was a student there was a girl who used to attend gatherings of the University religious organisations. She was a brilliant scholar and could hold her own in any intellectual discussion. Then she fell in love with a student who claimed to be an atheist. She fondly believed she could win him over, so sure was she of her own faith. Again

and again we saw them in earnest discussion. Then we became anxious lest the winning over would be done by the young man. She herself became so distressed about it that she took ill and was hospitalised for several weeks. This proved a blessing in disguise. She had time to see things more clearly and in perspective. She realised that her young man was unusually stubborn and unless he changed there would be a gulf between them all their lives. Since it seemed impossible for her to change him in spite of all her arguments and all her prayers, she came to the point where she decided to end their friendship, to "cut off" their romance. She still felt troubled about his eternal soul, but she saw it was better for those who were not so emotionally involved to work with him. Otherwise both of them were likely to finish in the quagmire of doubt and unbelief.

Jesus calls all His followers to a life of personal discipline. There may be many things in our lives which are harmless in themselves, but if they lead us into temptation we should cut them out. There is a fashion in some quarters today to pour scorn on the Puritans, so much so that the word with certain people is now used as a sneer. But at least the Puritans knew what they believed. They had backbone. There was nothing flabby about their Christianity. They put iron into the British character and they laid solid foundations for a mighty nation across the Atlantic.

At no time did Jesus ever pretend it was easy to follow Him. To be a Christian we must be prepared for self-discipline. As Tennyson put it,

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power."

This has brought us back to the original context in Matthew of the "difficult saying of Jesus" we have been considering. [He was speaking of matrimonial infidelity and His words hit home very hard to a man I once knew. He was married to a very worthy wife and they had three fine teen-age children. Then he became infatuated with another woman. This went on for many months. He lived a double life, frequently telling lies to cover his clandestine meetings. As usually happens, his business began to suffer, his health declined and he really deteriorated in character. At last he woke up to himself and decided to end this illicit association. He was quite sincere, but he found it was easier said than done. He had become deeply involved with the other woman and she didn't want to end it. He felt he had to "be fair" to her and, as he was still very attracted to her, he continued to see her, though less frequently. His life was full of conflict and tension. In his own twisted way he was religious. One day in his misery he was searching the Bible for guidance when he came across these words, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." Closing the Book he said, "That settles it. I'll end this business completely." He did and only then did he find spiritual peace and power returning to him. No one can fiddle with sin and not pay the price sooner or later.]

CHAPTER TWO

You Must Hate Father and Mother

When I invited members of the congregation and radio listeners to submit topics for this series of sermons, I received more requests to preach on the difficult saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 14:26 than on any other:—

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

Let us consider first the nature of the difficulty, then the explanation of it and finally its message for us today.

THE DIFFICULTY

As I see it there are two main aspects of the difficulty. On the one hand this teaching conflicts directly with our noblest natural instincts. On the other hand it contradicts so many other teachings of Jesus that we are thrown into utter confusion. John Henry Jowett, preaching in New York on one occasion, said of this text:—

“I know no word in the New Testament Scriptures which has given more needless distress to the hearts of gentle people than this. If the saying is to be interpreted by the letter it would seem to enshrine the

very spirit of jealousy. Had it been used by you or me it would suggest the narrow peevish speech of a jealous husband or a jealous wife . . . Nothing like jealousy ever found a moment's lodgment in the Master's heart . . . It was the supreme purpose of Jesus to constrain us to love one another."

Professor Alfred Plummer in his monumental commentary on Luke's Gospel says, "To hate one's parents as such would be monstrous."

If we turn to the 15th chapter of Matthew we find Jesus saying to the Pharisees:—

"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death."

Jesus then went on to denounce the Pharisees for the devices they had invented to free them from their duty to parents. Our Lord declared that He had come to fulfil the Law, not to destroy it. At the same time he declared that the whole Law was summed up in two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbour. No neighbour is nearer than parents, or wife or children!

Jesus taught us to love even our enemies. It is surely completely illogical to love enemies and hate members of our own family.

As I was meditating on this problem a thought came to me which I have not found in any commentary, but which seems to me highly significant. If Jesus really did

teach His disciples to hate father and mother, not only was He contradicting Himself, but He was speaking directly against the Ten Commandments. He was violating one of the most sacred principles of their society. That being so, why did not His enemies charge Him with this when they brought Him to trial? Any explanation we consider must allow for this important omission.

THE EXPLANATION

In view of the point I have just made I, personally, am tempted to think that in the translation of the Aramaic spoken by Jesus into the Greek as written by Luke a shade of meaning in the Aramaic idiom has been lost. I recall a personal experience to show how a slight twist of an idiom can give the opposite impression to that intended.

One day in Jerusalem I was talking to an Arab about the tension between Jews and Arabs and the insistence by both races that the country was theirs by right. I was trying to assess the relative numbers on each side and I said to my Arab friend, "Are there many Arabs in Palestine?" I could not believe my ears when he replied, "Yes, too many." If a Jew had said that it would have been understandable, but it was more than an Arab's life was worth in those days to express that kind of sentiment. As we talked on, I realised that the Arab to whom I was speaking would have liked to see twice as many Arabs in Palestine and no Jews. Why then did he say there were "Too many" Arabs in Palestine? I was mystified until later that day. As we drove down to Jericho I said to him, "Are there many banana trees in Jericho?" He replied, "Yes, too many." Testing him

with a number of similar questions I found that every time he wanted to say, "Very many" he said "Too many." His English was good, but he slipped on an occasional idiom like this. When you analyse the two sayings literally it is easy to see how he made the mistake, but it was a mistake which in certain circumstances might have cost him his life.

I am not saying that the translations from Aramaic to Greek to English have made Jesus say the opposite of what He intended, but I do say there are good grounds for believing that He did not mean "hate" in our sense of the word. For one thing look at Matthew's version of the same teaching, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Here there is no suggestion that it is wrong to love father or mother, merely that in a disciple called to leave all and follow Christ, that love must not exceed his love for His Master. Again Professor C. C. Torrey of Yale who has made a translation of the Gospels from the Aramaic in which they were probably written, gives us the following version of the verse in Luke:—

"If any man comes to me and will not put aside his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters . . ."

J. B. Phillips put the word in quotation marks ("hate") implying that it is to be used in a special sense. Until we find the actual Aramaic original we can only make conjectures on this point but at least let us bear it in mind while we consider the meaning of this difficult saying of Jesus in the light of its context.

In this respect I would emphasise right away that Jesus is speaking to those who there and then wished to be His disciples. He was asking them to leave home and kindred and follow Him as the nucleus of the great new movement which we know today as Christianity. Jesus had likened it to a banquet to which guests had been invited, but declined to join in for various reasons, one being too busy with his property, another being involved in a business deal and the third having just married. All the excuses given were excellent, but Jesus was driving home two points. On the one hand nothing was more important than the Kingdom of God. On the other hand those who were prepared to be full-time disciples had to count the cost which might be very considerable. A man does not build a tower or a king go to war without first estimating expenditure and risk. Here we see the complete honesty of Jesus as He frankly puts the situation before those who were eagerly offering themselves as His disciples.

Another angle which must be kept well in mind is this; Jesus knew He was fulfilling prophecy. For centuries the Rabbis had taught them that when the "Day of the Lord" came and the Messiah appeared then it would be said:—

"The son despises his father, the daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law, and a man's enemies are those of his own household."

The language is so similar that we must take it as something more than a coincidence.

Furthermore let us remember what in fact did happen. Peter, for one, had to choose between staying at home with his family and going with Jesus. We can well imagine his wife and children trying to talk him out of it. Zebedee when he saw his two sons, James and John, going off and leaving him to mind their fishing business by himself must have had very mixed feelings to say the least. Have you ever tried to imagine the feelings of Paul's father and mother when they learned that he, of all people, had gone over to the Nazarene? We can hardly believe that Jesus wished to set any man at variance with his family, but His coming did in fact have this effect.

Down the centuries in various ways and at various times this tension in families because of the loyalty of some members to Christ has frequently been painful. One thinks of the distress felt by Francis of Assisi's father when his son declined to carry on his drapery business. Some years ago I myself was attacked by the father of a girl whom we accepted for missionary work. He felt we were asking too much of him to send his daughter so far away, into the midst of no small danger. We should spare a thought for all such parents. They do indeed make a real sacrifice and we can hardly wonder if some do their utmost to prevent a son or daughter serving Christ in this way. I am quite sure Jesus did not intend us to take His words to mean that we serve Him by hating our parents, but I am equally sure that He wanted those prepared to be His full-time disciples to face the fact that some of them would have to face opposition and even hatred on the part of their parents and be put in the position of appearing to hate father and mother.

Before we leave the explanation consider one other point. Jesus always practised what He preached. Did He then "hate" His own mother? I can find no evidence of that emotion in His relationships with Mary. Admittedly there were times as for instance in the Temple, at Cana and the day His family sought to restrain Him, when He very firmly put His duty before their wishes, but He loved His mother to the end and even in the midst of His own great agony on the cross made provision for her.

THE MESSAGE FOR US TODAY

As we examine the real meaning of these words several important messages stand out for us today.

The love of family is the first and strongest loyalty we have. If Jesus Christ claims a greater loyalty, He has a perfect right to do so because He is the Son of God.

When we were visiting Korea we worshipped in a Church in Masan where the Pastor was a man with a tragic story. He had belonged to North Korea, but the communists made it impossible for him to carry on his Christian work. An opportunity to escape and to take up the ministry again in South Korea came to him. It meant leaving behind his wife and four children. What a terrible choice for anyone to make! It is years now since he left his loved ones behind and they have not been able to join him yet. They may never succeed, though we pray they will. Meanwhile here is a man who put loyalty to Christ, as he saw it, ahead of loyalty to family.

On the other hand we can hardly think of this kind

of sacrifice without thinking of Peter's question, (Matthew 19:27) "Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Jesus said:—

"Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Why did Jesus mean by that? Obviously He didn't mean literally that we would have a hundred fathers, or a hundred wives or a hundred children, though from the point of view of Christian fellowship a case might be made for that view. But I think He meant what Richard Lovelace meant when he wrote to his beloved Lucasta:

"I could not love thee (Dear) so much
Loved I not honour more."

Richard Lovelace was a handsome young courtier in the seventeenth century, heir to great estates in Kent, who was desperately in love with his fiancée whom he calls Lucasta in his famous poem. He could have settled down with her in ease and comfort, but conceiving it a point of honour to enlist and go to war, he chose that instead. In doing so he discovered what many a serviceman before and since has found, that love of a fiancée or wife is enriched and strengthened when it appears to be sacrificed for a noble cause. The service of Christ may take us away from those we love,

but if they love Him as we love Him the bond between us is strengthened and glorified.

Summing it all up we may say that this difficult saying of Jesus means that He, the Son of God who loved us and died for us, has a greater claim on our love and loyalty than anybody else on earth.

CHAPTER THREE

From Him That Hath Not it Shall be Taken

Luke 19:26

“Unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.”

Coming from the lips of any one but Jesus Christ that would be a jarring statement. Coming from Him it is shattering. How could He of whom the Gospel record says so often, “He had compassion,” say such a harsh thing? At the beginning of His ministry He announced that He had come to “preach the gospel to the poor . . . to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Speaking of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick and those in prison He said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.” He loved mankind so dearly He was prepared to go to the cross to bring us back to God. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” How could He, of all people, say “From him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.”?

EXPLANATION

As often happens much of the trouble comes from taking words out of their context. This difficult saying

appears several times in the teachings of Jesus, but generally speaking it is related either to the parable of the sower, or to the parable of the talents. In the latter case when Jesus told the story (as recorded by St. Luke) He connected it with an actual historical incident. The dying Herod the Great willed his kingdom to his son Archelaus, though he had previously decided that his other son Antipas should follow him. Knowing the reputation of Archelaus, a man as brutal as his father, the Jews upon the death of Herod sent an embassy of fifty men to Rome to plead with Augustus the Emperor not to give the kingdom to Archelaus. Augustus decided in favour of Archelaus who returned to Palestine and exacted vengeance against his enemies. Before leaving he had entrusted various departments to public officials and, coming back, he rewarded or punished them according to their service. Jesus took this well-known incident to teach important spiritual and moral truths. It was a simple statement of fact in regard to some who had little, that even the little they had was taken from them.

The parable of the sower reminds us of a situation we have often seen in Australia. A farmer who works hard, prepares his ground well and watches over the crop is rewarded with a big harvest. He goes on to even greater things the following year. Another farmer, who is lazy and indifferent, comes to the day when he can't make ends meet. He loses his land and becomes the servant of the other man. It is a law of life, If we don't use, we lose.

USE OR LOSE

The universe is built on this principle. Shortly after

the war I had occasion to fly across the Pacific. We were on a slow plane and leaving Fiji early one morning for Honolulu we flew nearly all day without seeing anything but ocean below us. As the day wore on the pilot sent back a message saying headwinds had reduced his fuel and he was diverting to a lonely coral atoll for fresh supplies. This proved to be Canton Island, one of the loneliest places anywhere until World War II. It was still the home of the frigate bird. Centuries ago the frigates sought their food like any other sea bird flying out across the ocean and diving for fish. Then they found that the gannets or boobies were returning to the island with gullets loaded. If they were chased, the smaller birds would disgorge their fish, so saving the frigate birds a considerable amount of trouble. In time the frigates lost their capacity to search for food and relied entirely on the gannets. If the gannets failed to return the frigates starved.

There are hundreds of examples of the "Use or lose" principle in Nature. In certain caves in Newfoundland there are fish which have lived for so long without light that although they have eyes, the eyes no longer see. Naturalists tell us that long ago both the kiwi of New Zealand and the emu of Australia were capable of flying, but from long disuse their wings have now reached such a point they are useless. In my student days I was very fond of rowing and when in training felt no ill effects after a gruelling mile race. On one occasion I took part in a country regatta without training. The distance was only four hundred yards, but I was exhausted and took days to recover. Everybody knows what happens

to muscles that are not used. In one of our congregations we had a lady who was remarkably spry even when approaching her ninetieth year. She has since gone far beyond that point. I asked her one day what was the secret of her good health and she explained that when she was young she was much impressed by a doctor who pointed out the need for every muscle, joint and organ of the body being kept in regular use if its efficiency is to be maintained. Even in her eighties she was still doing regular exercises daily and the results were certainly impressive.

“Use or lose” is a principle which we see operating daily in the financial, economic or business world. In every important city we see great new buildings rising. In the past ten years the skylines of Sydney and Melbourne have completely changed. Where are these great new buildings being erected? For the most part on sites which were not being used sufficiently in relation to their present market value. Life says to so many people, justify your existence or get out.

In His parables Jesus was primarily concerned with moral and spiritual lessons. Let us then consider the “Use or lose” principle at these levels. God has given each of us some capacity to resist temptation. A young man may be tempted to do something dishonest. If he fails to use his capacity to resist such a temptation, he will find it harder to resist next time. Eventually he will find it almost impossible to resist.

Take prayer and worship. Every child is born with this capacity, but nothing is more certain that if the capacity is neglected prayer will become increasingly difficult

and unreal. Worship, instead of being the highest and most satisfying activity, will become utter boredom. Take our capacity to love. The more we love in a pure and unselfish way, the greater becomes our ability to love. But let a man turn inward on himself, live a selfish life, refuse to let himself go in love, his soul will shrivel and he will lose this God-given ability. Whatever the spiritual activity you name, the same principle applies: "To him that hath it shall be given, and from him that hath not even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

Recently I had the pleasure of addressing a Bible Study group formed at the time of the Billy Graham Crusade. Several of the group had been Church members before, but others had had no vital contact with religion. To me it was quite exciting to find how these people had taken the seed sown two years previously and nurtured it, especially by bible study, prayer and christian fellowship. Today spiritual strength goes out from that group to quite a number of homes and far beyond. On the other hand I can think of people who made similar decisions during the same Crusade, who did nothing to nurture their new-found faith. As they look back now they do so with embarrassment and with no sense of conscious gain.

The reference to bible study brings me back to the main message of our text when it is related to the parable of the Sower. Jesus said the Spirit would come to guide us into all truth—especially spiritual truth. If we respond and understand a little, we will be able to respond more next time until the discovery of spiritual truth becomes an exciting occupation. On the other hand, if we shut out the Spirit at the beginning we lose the

capacity to respond at all. From him that hath not it will be taken away even that which he hath in the way of spiritual discernment. In spiritual matters we can't stand still. Either we go back, or we go forward. We degenerate or we grow in grace.

IF YOU DON'T USE, YOU LOSE MORE THAN THE ORIGINAL GIFT

This was true of the men in the parable. It is true in Nature, in the economic field and in many other directions. The Indians did little to develop the vast economic resources of North America so they were dispossessed by the more energetic white man. The same is true of Australia. The white people of Australia can take little comfort from this principle because it is obvious that unless we develop this country far more rapidly than we are doing the people of overcrowded Asia will have some justice in taking action. Not for one moment do I deprecate what has been done. Australia can point to amazing achievements for so young a nation and so few people. But can we honestly say that ten million people are really using this continent? We must use it to the benefit of all mankind or get out.

A young lady, who some years ago made her decision for Christ and then turned her back on religion was troubled because she thought she had committed the unpardonable sin. From her reading of certain passages of Scripture (mainly taken out of their context) it seemed clear to her that having "gone back on her decision" there was no second chance for her. I tried to explain to her that the Church is full of people to whom God

has given a second chance, just as He did to Peter after his failure. The passages which troubled her are the Biblical expressions of the psychological truth that those who repeatedly reject the promptings of the Spirit of God and harden their hearts against Him, reach a point where they cannot respond. It is commonly recognised that the hardest people to win to a decision for Christ are those who have been inoculated with a little religion until they become immune to the real thing. To bring this back to our main theme, if we fail to nurture and use what little faith we have, not only do we lose that faith, but we reach a state in which we are deprived of all the blessings of the spiritual life.

In the parable of the talents there was the stocktaking, the day of judgement. Sometimes when Jesus told this story the servants were given varying amounts signifying the different qualities individuals possess, five talents, two talents or one. On the occasion recorded by Luke they were each given the same amount. One man multiplied his pound by ten, another by five. The third kept his pound wrapped up in a handkerchief. In both versions of the parable the rewards and punishments are based on the same principle. If you use what has been entrusted to you, you will be given extra responsibility, if you fail to use it, you lose it. The man who failed spent much time meditating on the nature of his master, but that didn't save him. Action was required. There is, no doubt, a place for theoretical theology, but unless we put our theology and our faith into practice, the day will come when we hear the words, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto these my brethren, ye did it not unto me." Let none

of us forget that one day we must look into the eyes of the living Christ and give an account of our stewardship.

IF YOU DO USE, MUCH MORE WILL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU

It is the positive and encouraging note of our text which is the important one so let us conclude with that.

The seed that fell into good ground brought forth fruit some thirty fold, some sixty fold, some a hundred fold. The men who used their talents well were placed in positions of much responsibility, but also of much honour. The more we use God-given talents the keener these talents become. Besides, more talents are given us, and more opportunities to use them.

A delightful story is told of the time that Raphael was painting one of his greatest pictures, the Sistine Madonna. He had almost finished his lovely portrayal of the Mother and the Holy Child and was looking at a blank space at the bottom of the picture. It needed something, but he could not think what to do with it. As he pondered the problem he heard a rustling in the bushes outside his window. Two curly haired urchins appeared. Propping their arms on the window sill they gazed with open-eyed wonder at the painting and the artist. Who can resist the impulse to watch an artist at work? Others might have been irritated by their impudence, but Raphael seized this unexpected opportunity and with superb skill painted their portraits into his picture, capturing the look of wonder which was precisely what he wanted for his sacred theme. Raphael was unaware of the reason why they had hidden in the bushes of his garden. In point of fact they had been up to mischief ringing

doorbells, stealing fruit and throwing stones at a horse until it bolted. Chased by some soldiers they had taken refuge in the bushes outside the studio. Eventually the soldiers found them and began to haul them away for punishment, calling them "Young devils". Raphael intervened saying, "You may call them young devils, but I have made them angels for ever." He then showed them his canvas and the soldiers were so amazed that the urchins seized their opportunity and escaped again!

The artist who uses his talent is given more and more opportunities to use it. The singer who develops his ability to sing finds more and more doors of opportunity opening before him. Beginning then from a text which seems harsh and discouraging we have come round now to the positive side of the picture from which some great and inspiring truths emerge. God entrusts us all with gifts and talents. If we are faithful, if we are reliable, if we show we can be trusted in little things, then He rewards us far beyond our imagination. God puts great stress on reliability. Show yourself reliable and you will find God bountiful indeed.

The man who failed to use his talent and spent his time meditating on the nature of his master came to the conclusion that he was a hard man. The others who used their talents came to know the real nature of their master and found he was kind and generous. It is in action in service that we come to know the true nature of God. He is a God of loving-kindness and great generosity. From the spiritual point of view there isn't any doubt that "unto every one which hath shall be given."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Last Shall be First

• Matthew 20:16

“So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

When I began my series of addresses on “The Difficult Sayings of Jesus”, as stated earlier I invited members of the congregation and radio listeners to submit sayings of our Lord which they had found puzzling. Among those who submitted texts were three young Church of Christ student pastors who had been attending the lunch-hour services throughout the series. The words which troubled them were, “The last shall be first.”

These five simple words sum up a great truth about Christianity, a truth which was expressed by the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17) when they mobbed the house of Jason thinking that Paul and Silas were inside. Failing to find the apostles they brought Jason and his friends before the rulers of the city saying, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” We cannot deny that our faith often reverses the values of the world. That which the natural man puts at the top of his list of priorities Jesus Christ often put at the bottom. Where His influence prevails His own prophecy is often fulfilled, “The last shall be first and the first last.” Let us illustrate this truth by

considering the three recorded occasions on which Jesus spoke these words.

THE MAN WHO SHUT THE DOOR

One day, as recorded in Luke 13, Jesus urged His listeners to strive to enter in at the strait gate, because the time would come when the Master of the house would shut the gate. Those outside would protest, "You know us. We often sat at the same meal table together," but it would be to no avail. They, as "workers of iniquity", would be ordered to depart while many strangers from distant places would be admitted. Then there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" on the part of those who had thought themselves privileged persons and even V.I.P.s. In that day they would discover there are many which are last who become first.

The same references to weeping and gnashing of teeth, together with the presence of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph in the kingdom of God, appear in the story of the Centurion of Capernaum recorded in the eighth chapter of Matthew. In this case the Centurion, a Gentile, came to Jesus pleading with Him to heal his paralysed servant. Jesus offered to visit the house to do so, but the Centurion in his humility and in his faith assured Him it was not necessary. He himself was a man under authority with others under his authority. He felt sure Jesus had only to say the word and his servant would be healed. It was then that Jesus remarked that He had not found faith like this in Israel. He went on to say that many would come (that is many Gentiles) from the east and the west and would sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob

in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom would be cast into outer darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In this first use of our text I'm sure the meaning is clear enough. For centuries the Jews had been ill-treated by Gentiles. They dreamed of the day when the Messiah of God would come and do them justice. In that day they believed they would be on top and it would be "darkness and gnashing of teeth" for the Gentiles. They were quite sure that they themselves, having been last in the eyes of the world for centuries, would now be first. But Jesus astonished and angered them by claiming to be the Messiah and then stating that Gentiles like this Centurion who belonged to the hated Romans, because of their faith would have priority over Jews who were so sure of their position just because they were Jews.

Leaving aside the particular historical context let us notice the enormous importance that Jesus puts upon faith and a right relationship with God through faith. The backbone of every Church is usually found in a comparatively few families who demonstrate a spiritual quality and a loyalty well above the average. This was certainly the case in a little Church attached to the Port Adelaide charge where I began my ministry. Among those who founded this little Church at Peterhead was a certain Captain Inglis and his wife. The Captain had passed on before my time, but I knew his widow in her extreme old age. After her passing the family presented a beautiful communion table to the Church in her memory. On the occasion when we dedicated this memorial I reminded the congregation that Mrs. Inglis had a favourite

psalm, the Ninety-first, and her favourite words in that psalm were, "In Him will I trust." This lady had little wealth or education, but in the hearts of many people in the Peterhead district she took a leading place because of the gracious influence that was hers and the good she had done as a woman of faith. Many of those who were successful in the eyes of the world will be forgotten while this humble woman will still be gratefully remembered. The last shall be first, because of faith. The humble are more likely to trust in God in a practical way because they are more conscious of their need than others. The thing that matters is a right relationship with God. Those who have faith are those who are certain to be admitted to His kingdom.

PETER

The second occasion on which Jesus stated that the last would be first was following the visit of the rich young ruler who wanted to be a disciple, but could not accept the sacrifice necessary. Jesus watched him go away and said sadly, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom." It was then that Peter said, "Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27.) Jesus promised him that in due course their rewards would be "an hundredfold" but "many that are first shall be last".

Yet again it is clear that when we talk about the spiritual life many of the world's standards are reversed. People think money will buy anything, but it can be more of a hindrance than a help when we seek spiritual peace,

or joy or power. The world looked up to wealthy men in a position of high social standing like the rich young ruler. It despised humble fishermen like Peter and Andrew, James and John. To this day we don't know the name of the Rich Young Ruler, but thousands of Churches are named after Peter, Andrew and the other disciples.

As Mary sang in her "Magnificat", having learned that she of all women had been chosen to be the Mother of the Saviour,

"He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

Paul put it this way to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:27),

"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

All the time God surprises the world by turning its values upside down and choosing the most unlikely people to do the greatest things for Him. Who would have picked that rough, impulsive fisherman, Peter, to be head of a Church? The world would have put him last in any selection for executive position in such a sphere, but Jesus Christ put him first.

Let us remind ourselves of the definition of greatness we have from our Lord. As He put it, the world considers

that man great who can command the service of many. Jesus said greatness consists in giving service. In spite of itself the world has been compelled again and again to recognise that fundamental truth. Recently our city was saddened by the passing of a "rich young ruler" who found a vital Christian faith before he died on June 23rd 1961 at the age of thirty. I refer to Mr. David Lloyd Jones, Joint Managing Director of one of the largest emporiums in the world, "David Jones'," founded by his great grandfather in 1838. Some six weeks before the end, knowing that he had an incurable cancer condition, David Lloyd Jones wrote letters to a number of people. I quote two paragraphs from one of these letters addressed to an executive in the company.

10th May, 1961

"My dear Mr. . . . ,

I have only just received word that I will not have too much longer to spend on this earth, and, naturally, having tidied up my affairs and thought of my family position, my next thoughts turn to all those at 'David Jones'," particularly those in responsible positions."

(There follow three paragraphs of a personal nature and then the letter concludes—)

"Never forget the principles of honesty, fair trading and service on which this great organisation was founded. I depend on you to keep these principles as part of our tradition.

With every good wish,

Sincerely,

(Signed) David Lloyd Jones."

The original David Jones was a devout Congregationalist who put his Christian principles into action. His great grandson was an Anglican who was visited daily by his vicar the Rev. C. A. Goodwin of St. Mark's, Darling Point, in the last weeks. At the funeral service only hymns of praise were sung and David's wife Rosemary wore white as a symbol of the triumph of Christian faith, another example of how Christianity turns the world's values upside down.

THE EMPLOYER OF LABOUR

The third occasion on which Jesus used the expression, "The last shall be first," was in telling the parable of the labourers in the vineyards who all received the same wage though some had borne the heat and burden of the day while others only began work an hour before sunset. Once in Basra on the Persian Gulf I saw men in eastern clothing squatting on the verandah of a store. In the middle of the afternoon a man came along and selected several of them for a job he wanted done. It made it easy to picture the circumstances of the story Jesus told.

Now taking the story literally and by itself the employer was most unjust. He was not fair to those who had worked all day even though they had to admit they had agreed on a fair wage and he had kept to that. We should put this story beside the parable of talents and, when we do, we get the important principle, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

The parable of the penny wage should be a comfort

to those facing unemployment. It has done more than any other teaching to alleviate their position. Just a hundred years ago John Ruskin was publishing his famous essays which were later issued in book form under the title, *Unto This Last*, a title taken from this parable. These essays were first published in a magazine edited by Thackeray, but they stirred so much opposition Thackeray discontinued them. Nevertheless most of the reforms Ruskin advocated have since become generally accepted. He attacked the old theory of *laissez faire* whereby a man sold his labour for what he could get and if he could not find employment he and his family starved. Ruskin urged legislation which would encourage a regular flow of employment and do something about fixing just wages. Following the teaching of Jesus Christ he tried to get human values put first and financial considerations second. It didn't make him very popular, but today we realise he was right. In these days the man who is unemployed receives some kind of relief from the State. God cares for the man who cannot find work. So must we. That is practical Christianity.

This parable has had a great influence on our economics and our social attitudes. But as Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out (*Beyond Tragedy*) the primary lesson of this story is spiritual. God is so infinitely holy and mighty that none of us can earn merit in His sight. It is important to live righteously, but when it comes to eternal life we can't earn it. It is a gift of God to those who are faithful whether their service has been long or short. In fact, as Niebuhr stresses, those who have served for a long time are in danger of pride and jealousy. Consequently they

lose the very things on which they have set their hearts so that the first become last, and the last first. One thinks of the elder brother who shut himself out from the party when the prodigal brother returned. The same was true of Simon the Pharisee who was proud of his righteousness and contemptuous of the woman who was a sinner washing our Lord's feet. It was not the woman whom Jesus rebuked, it was Simon. Again the last was first.

All this is explained by the love of God and our response to that love. It is noteworthy that parents who have a sub-normal child, or a child handicapped in some way, lavish extra love and care on that child. There is a great story told by Dale Evans, the film star, of what their retarded daughter did for them, when they gave their best to her. If human parents in their love will do that, how much more will God care for those who are underprivileged and handicapped in the battle of life? When it comes to love it is normal that the last should be first.

Many years ago my father when still in his teens was benighted when making a long trip by bicycle across country. He saw a light in the distance and found a lonely farm-house. He asked for hospitality which was readily given. In the morning he was astonished to find no fewer than seventeen children appear, a good proportion of whom he must have dispossessed from their bed over-night. However, they soon became good friends. The mother was nursing the baby as they talked. My father looked at this enormous brood and said, "Which one do you love most?" The mother looked down at the tiniest and weakest of them all, the babe in her arms and said, "This one." The last shall be first.

Yes, love always puts the last first. Jesus loved us and, as He put it, He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. It was the lost sheep, the last sheep into the fold, He cared about. The day came when to achieve our salvation He permitted Himself to be despised and rejected of men. But the last shall be first and today He is king of kings and the lord of lords, the only ruler of princes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

If there had been newspapers in those days they would have produced a placard reading, SHOCK STATEMENT BY VISITING EVANGELIST. Had Jesus said, "Blessed are the strong in spirit," there would have been no problem. But how could anybody say that the poor in spirit are happy?

Yet Jesus did say it and what was more it was the opening statement of the greatest sermon in history. He began with the "Beatitudes", the Blessings, and among them all this was the one to which He gave priority. It greatly surprised the disciples, and it certainly impressed them. As they came to understand the real meaning of it, they saw why Jesus considered it so important and why it had to come first. By this door believers enter into all the wonderful things which God has prepared for them.

Now it wasn't easy to understand. Jesus knew that and so He kept His harder teachings for the mountain top. He didn't give these things to the multitude on the plain. He waited until He had His disciples alone on the high and inaccessible place to give them this strong meat. This was His "ideal" teaching. Only the initiated could hope to understand it, let alone practise it. They had to have some spiritual understanding before they started. It was strong meat, but when they were able to absorb it, to digest it spiritually, it was meat indeed for their hungry souls.

Let us look at the two versions which we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and then the translation in the New English Bible.

BLESSED ARE YE POOR

When Luke recorded this Beatitude he made it read, "Blessed are ye poor." (ch. 6;20). How do we explain this variation between "Blessed are ye poor" and "Blessed are the poor in spirit"? It seems likely that Jesus repeated this teaching on many occasions, using both forms at different times. Properly understood they mean the same thing. Luke, who wrote his gospel before Matthew wrote his, had a great concern for poor people. He alone records the stories of the rich man and Lazarus, the importunate widow and the Good Samaritan. He makes much of the warnings Jesus issued to the rich. It was natural that he should keep the simpler form. Writing his gospel later Matthew was more concerned to stress the spiritual significance of our Lord's teaching and so he preferred the words which we believe Jesus also used, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Most people today have become so accustomed to the idea that it is a good thing to be rich, and exert so much effort to attain material wealth, that any suggestion that poverty could be a blessed condition really shocks them. It is blasphemy. I am not just talking of capitalists. I am talking also of communists. When Karl Marx wrote "Religion is the opiate of the people," I'm sure he had in mind these words of Jesus "Blessed are ye poor." But then Marx didn't understand the true meaning of these words any more than the majority of people do today. So far from

religion being the opiate of the people in the days of Jesus, if it had not been for the religious folk, the lot of poor people would have been unbearable in the extreme. Nobody thought the poor were blessed. On the contrary many people considered them accursed. If they were afflicted by drought or their business had failed, to the ancient mind this was a sure sign they were out of favour with God. The poor must have sinned. Miserable enough because of their economic problems they were now rejected by society. Their position would have been completely intolerable, but for the humane laws of Moses and other enlightened religious and national leaders. It was Moses who commanded farmers to leave corn behind them in the field so that poor people, like Ruth and Naomi, might glean. It was he who made it illegal for a man to take another man's cloak in a lawsuit, thus depriving him of necessary bed-covers at night. All through the Old Testament and especially the Psalms we find expressed God's concern for those who are poor. "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles," sings the author of Psalm 34. If God revealed His concern for the poor and needy in the Old Testament, it is hardly surprising that Jesus brought a message of good news for them and announced this first in His sermon on the mount.

The word "poor" in the Bible came to have a special meaning. As Dr. William Barclay points out the word has passed through four stages. In the beginning it stood for somebody with very few possessions. Today every poor person in a Christian community has some kind of pension or is eligible for some kind of relief. He at least has a vote and can voice his complaints through the columns of news-

papers or through welfare organizations. But in those days they had no vote and no kind of organization to help them. To be poor meant to have no influence. Because they had no influence the poor became the down-trodden and the oppressed. In this wretched situation they were driven to put their trust in God, since it was hopeless to put their trust in men. In Greek there are two words for "poor". One (penes), from which we get our word penury, refers to a man who is poor, but who at least has a job. The other word (ptochos) refers to a man who hasn't got anything at all, the man who is absolutely destitute and desperate. This is the word used here. He has no worldly resources, God is his only hope and so he puts his trust in Him. I know that poverty can be a soul-searing and frightening experience. But when it leads a man to throw himself on God in faith it is the beginning of great things. The real saints of God are so often found among poor people.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Now let us turn back to this saying of Jesus as it was recorded by St. Matthew as the first Beatitude; "Blessed are the poor in spirit." It seems to me it can be taken in two ways.

(a) In the light of what we have just been saying it probably refers to the right kind of attitude towards material possessions. The spiritually-minded do not worship money or possessions. They worship God. Jesus recognised the danger in which rich people walked. They were constantly tempted to think that money could solve all their problems or buy what was necessary to satisfy the deep hunger of the soul. Completely absorbed by material things they grow

blind to the things that really matter. As Jesus put it in the colourful language of the East, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the spiritual kingdom of love, joy, peace and all that goes with spiritual adjustment and maturity. There are some who believe that Jesus was referring to the small pedestrian gate beside the main gate of a city. This small gate was called "The Eye of the Needle," being shaped like that. When the main gate was closed at night it was said that a camel, with very great difficulty, might squeeze through the "Eye of the Needle" gate, but to succeed he would have to get rid of his load. So a rich man could get into the kingdom of heaven, but to do so he would have to become detached mentally and spiritually from the load of his riches. In at least one case Jesus challenged a rich young ruler to give away his riches literally. It does not mean that a rich man cannot enter the kingdom, but he must become "poor in spirit". That is, he must become poor in his attitude, relying not on riches any more, but on God. Quite a number of rich people in the circle of Jesus' friends did do this, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and the ministering women. They came to see that it was far more important to live for God and the great spiritual values than to live for money. In that sense they were poor in spirit.

If you consider the real meaning of the word "blessed" you will see that there is much to be said for this interpretation. In the Greek it is the word "makarios". This was the name given to the present archbishop of Cyprus. Long ago Cyprus used to be called "The Blessed Isle" because it was so self-contained. It was rich in all necessary crops and products and did not have to rely on imports. It had no

balance of payment problems such as plague the nations today. So a man who was blessed in the sense in which Jesus was speaking, was a man who had all the resources necessary for his happiness within himself. He was not dependent on material possessions, on wealth, but being spiritually linked with God, he had permanent resources of blessedness which could not be taken from him.

(b) There is, however, another way in which we might interpret the words "poor in spirit". We might take them to mean that a man is weak in spirit. Even as I typed this chapter I received a letter from a nurse asking me to pray for one of her patients who was suffering greatly because of cancer. She wrote, "He has lost all interest in life and just doesn't want to live." When a patient has reached that state he is in a serious position indeed. Many a time we have had intercession for folk who are "poor in spirit" in this sense and it is amazing how through the faith of a congregation God can restore strength to the spirit of a patient. When the will to live returns quite often a spectacular healing follows.

Again we meet a great number of people suffering from what they call an "inferiority complex". It is made all the worse in these days because so many people are "status-seekers", trying to keep up with the Joneses, or preferably going ahead of them. This imposes an intolerable strain on many husbands and fathers and it is little wonder that thousands are cracking under the pressure. The Christian faith is the answer. When a man becomes a true follower of Jesus he realises that status-seeking is only doing to his neighbour what he wishes his neighbour would not do to him. He sees that all this status-business must be utterly trivial in the sight of an infinitely powerful God. When he

starts to love his neighbour as himself, he can rejoice in his neighbour's progress. This is the supreme answer to the inferiority complex. I'm sure it is an important part of the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus in the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Note that Jesus said, "is", not "will be". We already possess spiritual blessedness when we find the true attitude to which Jesus calls us. We are more likely to find that true attitude if we realise our need, if we know we are poor in spirit. So thirdly I want to consider the New English Bible translation of the first Beatitude.

(HOW BLEST ARE THOSE WHO KNOW THAT THEY ARE POOR)

Those who are poor in a financial sense usually know that they are poor and it doesn't make them very happy. If they don't know they are poor it does not worry them. The reference therefore must be to spiritual poverty. If we are unaware of our need at that point little can be done for us, but if we know we are poor spiritually then we are on our way to great things. J. B. Phillips translates our text, "How happy are the humble-minded, for they already own the Kingdom of Heaven!"

The world despises humility, but it is in fact the door to all real development and progress. The great scholars and scientists achieved what they did only because they were humble-minded and willing to learn. John Richard Green the famous historian is said to have died "still learning". At the end of his life Sir Isaac Newton, when complimented for his immense achievements, said he felt only like a schoolboy wandering along the seashore and picking up a shell

here and there. In my own experience one of the most modest and humble-minded men I've ever met was H. V. Morton, the author who wrote *In Search of Scotland* and the other "In Search of . . ." books. When I was assisting Dr. George Macleod in Govan in Glasgow, Mr. Morton and his charming Scottish wife spent a day with us gathering material to write an article on Dr. MacLeod's work in the slums for a big London daily newspaper. All that day and that evening I was with H. V. Morton as he interviewed people. He seemed almost apologetic for bothering them, but he showed such intense interest in everything they had to say, all of them gave their best. He would hardly speak a word. They did all the talking. Another journalist came full of his own importance. He spent most of his time telling us of the great things he had done. Was it any wonder that his article was full of inaccuracies, while Morton's caught the real spirit of the mission and was read with pleasure and profit by millions? H. V. Morton would never have become a great author but for his "inferiority complex" as some would have called it. I prefer to think of it as humble-mindedness.

But let us move back to the spiritual meaning of "blessed are the poor in spirit." The man who is proud and self-sufficient is contemptuous of the suggestion that he needs God. So he cuts himself off from life's greatest blessings. I think of a man who was well on his way to becoming one of the greatest scientists Australia has produced. Unfortunately he began to drink heavily until his drinking was out of control. As a result doors of opportunity began to close for him so that he drank more heavily than ever. A friend tried to get him to join Alcoholics Anonymous. He

was deeply offended. He didn't need help from anybody. He could conquer this by himself. A year later he was right down and right out. He was driven to become humble-minded. At last he was prepared to accept help from A.A. and to take the first step of the famous "programme", admitting that his drinking was out of control and that he needed a power greater than himself. He admitted he was "poor in spirit". That was the beginning of yet another very happy story, and today he is on his way once more to becoming a great scientist, and certainly a very useful member of society.

I challenge you to name any of the great saints who did not begin at this point. Paul's pride had to be broken before he could become a spiritual giant. As already noted he wrote (to the Corinthians) "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things . . . the weak things . . . the base things . . . the things that are despised . . ."

The hymn-writers knew this secret. A really great personality was Charles Wesley, well-adjusted, poised, noble and strong. It began with humble-mindedness. He wrote,

O for a heart to praise my God . . .
A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My great Redeemer's throne
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone.

Some think one of Isaac Watts' hymns the greatest hymn ever written:—

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Gipsy Smith had practically no formal education and no advantages. Yet God used him as an evangelist to win thousands to a new way of life. Gipsy Smith once said, "I sometimes think, when the instrument is very poor, the Lord gets a better chance. If the instrument is self-assertive and desirous of displaying its own magnificence and shining greatness, Jesus and the Holy Spirit may be crowded out." Here was a man who was "poor in spirit" but blessed because he knew it. I'm quite sure that if Billy Graham ever loses his amazing humility, he will lose his power. As it is, his favourite hymn seems to be, "To God be the glory".

All these evangelists call us to turn from our sin, to get humble-minded about that before the all-holy God. Another word for it is "repentance". After his failure and sin King David cried out (Psalm 51:17) "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Far from despising it, God can use it to bring a wonderful blessing to those who are humble-minded, who know they are poor in spirit.

One of my brother ministers here in Sydney once discovered the great truth which Jesus was proclaiming in the first Beatitude when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." In *Impact*, the magazine of the Central Methodist Mission, the Rev. Alan Walker described how one night, overwhelmed by some of the problems of the

Church, he could not sleep. Small difficulties loomed mountain high. Suddenly there came a message from the Spirit of God. The words were as though God had spoken them aloud. The Voice said, "It is My work, I will sustain it." For a time, lying in the darkness, Mr. Walker repeated over and over the words of promise. Then quietly and with a sense of calm and confidence, he dropped asleep. "It is My work, I will sustain it."

Too many of us tire ourselves out thinking it all depends on us. But God is in the picture too and when we are humble enough and have faith enough to "let go and let God" wonderful things happen. If you are poor in spirit and are humble enough to accept what God wills to give you, you have already become rich with spiritual blessings which no money can buy. I believe that is what Jesus meant when He said, "How blest are those who know that they are poor; the kingdom of heaven is theirs."

CHAPTER SIX

Faith Will Move Mountains

Matthew 17:20

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place: and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

A prisoner in gaol wrote to me soon after I began the addresses which form the chapters of this book. He explained that he and a number of other inmates in this South Australian prison were regular listeners to the weekly rebroadcasts of our Wednesday services. Compulsive alcoholism had brought him down. Struggling to find the answer he had received much help from religion. In reply I sent him some books and also some of our tonic prayer cards which included a list of the DIFFICULT SAYINGS OF JESUS on which I intended to preach. In his next letter he said,

"I am looking forward to hearing you speak on 'Faith Will Move Mountains.' At the present time I feel the Great Dividing Range stands between me and peace of mind."

I am quite sure that in these words of Jesus there is the answer to this man's problem, but first let us consider the difficulties in them.

THE DIFFICULTIES

Dr. Norman Maclean, formerly of St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh tells a good story in his *Years of Fulfilment*. During the first World War he and Dr. Wallace Williamson of St. Giles were paying an official visit to the British Fleet at Scapa Flow. One afternoon they went for a long walk together and were discussing how the power of prayer could help in days of crisis. In the midst of this solemn discussion Dr. Williamson asked Dr. Maclean if he had heard of the Old Highland woman who read in her Bible that faith could remove mountains. It so happened that between her cottage and the well to which she had to travel for her supplies of water there was a small hill. That night she prayed most earnestly that the hill would remove itself into the sea. When she came out in the morning and saw the hill still there she said, "I thought as much."

One of our handicaps as preachers is that we have these difficult sayings of Jesus explained to us in the Theological Hall and they become so clear to us that we don't realize that others who have never heard the explanation find in them a great barrier to faith. When I was a chaplain in the Air Force I was repeatedly astonished when well-educated men would deride religion and quote this very text as an example of the stupidity of it. It was, they said, the kind of impossible thing which Christianity asked its followers to believe. They would point out that never in history has there ever been any record of a mountain being removed by faith and even Jesus Himself could not do it. At least He did not do it, and there must have been many in the crowd that day who mentally, if not vocally, challenged Him to demonstrate how faith could remove a mountain.

That is, assuming He was referring to a literal and physical mountain. But was He?

Once when I was travelling across the salt-bush plains of South Australia west from Whyalla I saw in the distance a mountain which had been half-removed and I believe it has since been completely removed. I refer to Iron Knob. Being almost solid iron ore the mountain has been removed and smelted into steel by the Broken Hill Proprietary Company. In a sense you could say that mountain has been removed by faith. At the start of the project men needed faith to believe it could be done and they needed faith all along the road to overcome the difficulties which confronted them. Was it in that sense that Jesus said faith could remove mountains? Possibly, but I think He was referring more to the spiritual and moral realms.

THE EXPLANATION

In most of these difficult Sayings we have to consider whether Jesus was using some local idiom or common proverb. We ourselves have one or two proverbs about mountains which can't be taken literally. We talk of a man turning mole-hills into mountains. If that happened literally any normal community would disappear under a hundred mountains in a matter of hours. People who have been caught in a storm at sea speak of the mountainous waves and a housewife groans at the thought of "a mountain of washing".

In the days of our Lord, the Jews spoke of a teacher who had a gift for explaining and resolving the difficulties in Scripture as a man who was an "uprooter of mountains" or even as a "pulverizer of mountains". Sometimes they

referred to a teacher as one who was good at “tearing up mountains”. The expressions always related to the removal of difficulties.

In the story of the epileptic recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew where this difficult saying is found the disciples had come to Jesus with a problem. They said, “Why could we not cast him out?” They wanted an explanation of their failure. They wanted the power to heal as Jesus had healed this boy. The answer was faith, faith like a grain of mustard seed.

This story has always fascinated me since the time I was travelling in Palestine some years ago. One day I went for a long walk around the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. At points on that journey I could see the snow-capped peaks of Mt. Hermon rising nearly ten thousand feet above the floor of the valley. Tradition says that it was on that mountain that Jesus had that strange experience when He was transfigured in front of His disciples Peter, James and John. In his first epistle Peter confirms the report that they heard the voice of God that day saying “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. When they came down from that mountain they found a distracted father who said, (as translated in The New English Bible)

“Have pity, sir, on my son: he is an epileptic and has bad fits, and he keeps falling about, often into the fire, often into water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.”

It so happened that on my walk round the Sea of Galilee, I saw a group of excited Arabs near some tents pitched

beside the mouth of the northern part of the river Jordan. The group was standing round a series of small pools of water. A boy of about fourteen, fully clothed, was hurling himself first into one pool and then into another. There was a dazed look on his face and it was clear that he was not conscious of his actions. The Arabs were apparently just as helpless as I was, but fortunately the attack passed fairly quickly. Nevertheless the look on the face of the boy's mother made it plain that she was suffering the same tortures felt by the father long ago in the same part of the world, perhaps in that self-same spot.

Whether the boy I saw was an epileptic or suffered from some kindred affliction I am not qualified to say, but scholars are generally agreed that the one described by Matthew was an epileptic. George Lamsa has pointed out that conditions in the Middle East are particularly dangerous for people subject to fits. In the houses cooking is done on open fires, often in a scooped out hollow in the middle of the earthen floor. If an epileptic were alone in a house he could finish in this hollow and be badly burned. Again there were practically no bridges in Palestine. Streams were crossed by stepping stones and in full spate could provide that extra tension and fear to bring on an attack. The father's reference to falling into fire and into water rings true.

It is now recognized that following an epileptic attack certain patients, for some time, may appear normal, but are not responsible for their actions. Several famous crimes in Australia have been attributed to this condition. Little wonder that people in the old days believed this trouble was caused by devils. It is easy to understand the atmosphere of fear which would surround a boy subject to these

attacks. This boy was an only child and we can sense the distress of the father. In one respect the father was the boy's worst enemy because of the fear he felt for him. He was transferring more and more fear to him.

I would like to explain that point a little further. Every Sunday night at St. Stephen's we have intercessions for individuals who are sick. We try to focus the faith of the congregation on each patient in turn. Through such faith healing power flows at the spiritual level and through that to the mental and physical levels. In recent years we have prayed for more than ten thousand individuals. Among them have been many children. It has been our experience that when a child is ill, especially if it is a dangerous illness and certainly if it is mysterious, the parents are likely to panic. The child may not think he is very ill at all, but he absorbs the tension and fear of his parents and this stops the flow of the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing force of Nature, which is there to heal a cut finger or anything else that may be abnormal in our bodies. We find that if we can surround the parents with faith and prayer so that their tension is reduced and serenity instead of fear is transmitted to the child, healing usually follows very quickly.

This father long ago was overwhelmed by a mountain of fear. His only child, as so often in the past, was in danger of his life because, as he thought, a devil had possessed him. The disciples had tried to heal him, but obviously they were just as afraid of the devil as the father. Fortunately the father had such tremendous faith in Jesus that his own fears were calmed as soon as Jesus appeared. He pleaded with Jesus to heal his boy and Jesus said:

(Mark 9:23)

"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

The father replied with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Then Jesus healed the boy. There was one final convulsion and the child lay unconscious. However, Jesus took him by the hand, lifted him up and restored him quite healed to the father.

I don't claim to be a doctor, but it is surely clear that in epilepsy there is some mysterious building up of tension which finally brings on the attack. According to *Time*, June 30th, 1961 there are in the U.S.A. some 1,500,000 epileptics. Recently some of them have been given a chance to work in a factory of their own. It is significant that as they keep busy and are treated as normal human beings, the frequency of their attacks is very greatly reduced. Epilepsy is most distressing for the patient and to his loved ones. When an attack comes the whole atmosphere is charged with fear. As I put it above, there is a mountain of fear. The answer to fear is faith and love. The father had plenty of love, but his faith was not adequate until he came face to face with Jesus Christ and handed his problem over to him. He did have some faith, it could be said, as a grain of mustard seed. Jesus was able to work through that and increase it to give the patient what he most needed, freedom from tension.

Does this not explain why the disciples failed? They tried, but obviously they were almost as afraid as the father. Instead of transferring serenity and faith, they transferred fear making things worse instead of better. So often the

Church fails for want of faith, but if we can bring people directly into touch with Jesus Christ then the mountains of fear are removed and He brings salvation.

One final point regarding this biblical story. Jesus had just descended from the Mount of Transfiguration. That experience had greatly reinforced His own mighty faith. Those of us who would serve Him must remember the importance of seeking mountain-top experiences in worship to re-charge our spiritual batteries.

THE MESSAGE FOR US

Why did Jesus speak of faith “as a grain of mustard seed”? A grain of mustard seed is about the same size as a granule of coarse white sugar. He was contrasting something very large like a mountain with something very small, as we would say a pin-head. In His view faith was such a powerful force that if you had only a pinhead of the real thing, you could move a whole mountain of fear or grief or whatever else it may be that is crushing you.

When we were in New York we spent an hour or two in the clinic attached to Norman Vincent Peale’s Marble Collegiate Church. On the counter were available little pendants containing an actual mustard seed embedded in clear plastic. Some people like to wear them to remind themselves that dark thoughts can overwhelm us but just a small amount of faith is the answer. I don’t keep a mustard seed handy, but it occurs to me that most of us take sugar several times a day. It might not be a bad thing to form the habit of reminding ourselves that faith as represented by one granule of sugar is sufficient to remove the mountains which darken our lives.

Recently I had a letter from one of our listeners in the country. She described how she felt called to assist the overworked ministers in her town who were unable to cope with all the classes in the schools needing religious instruction. She is, so she says, a timid person and having a husband and several young children she felt she had an adequate excuse. But the challenge kept coming to her and at last she attended classes to prepare herself. In the classes she found she had some talent for illustration, but when the time came to teach she was terror-stricken. As she said, she had already died a thousand deaths with the thought of it. Now she began to search for some good excuse to get out of it, but the words of Proverbs 3 came to her,

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Her faith was weak, as small as a grain of mustard seed or a grain of sugar, but that enabled her to start. Having started she was amazed at her own eloquence. Some days she has felt she had no strength for the task, but then her faith has enabled her to transfer it to God and she adds, “He has taken over in a wonderful way.” So her own faith has been strengthened as she has gone on. The mountain of fear has been demolished. She concluded her letter by saying, “He has proved to me that if we trust Him and do the work He has instructed us to do, He will undertake for us in every way.”

In another place Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which is “the least of all seeds” but grows into a tree. In other words there is life in it and it grows.

One day a fellow minister and I were discussing the problem of composing sermons. Sometimes the importance and responsibility of it overwhelms you and you just don't know how to begin. It is like a mountain before you. My friend quoted one of his old professors, Professor W. Manson of Edinburgh, who used to say to his students faced with this problem, "Start writing". If you have enough faith to begin it is marvellous how it grows as you go along.

In his book *Faith is the Answer*, Norman Vincent Peale tells how he once received a request to visit one of his radio listeners in a tuberculosis hospital. Because of the condition of his spine the patient was lying on a mattress on a board and one hand was off at the wrist. He had suffered frequent haemorrhages and severe pain. He had been a successful lawyer, but now the future seemed hopeless. One day in hospital he heard Dr. Peale giving a radio talk and in it he said,

"Whoever you are, wherever you are, and in whatever condition or circumstances, if you surrender your life completely to God and put your trust in Him, you can obtain divine power by which you can win over anything."

In the radio talk Dr. Peale had gone on to say that the amount of faith needed was only as a mustard seed. The lawyer told Dr. Peale that he had heard that sort of thing in Church, but had not taken it seriously. Then in the hour of his extremity with a mountain of fear and pain towering over him he summoned his meagre resources of faith and

surrendered himself to God. Slowly the haemorrhages stopped and now three years later he told Dr. Peale he believed he would make a full recovery. Meanwhile he had already won a magnificent spiritual victory and Dr. Peale describes him as one of the happiest men he has met anywhere.

Today we know that most tuberculosis patients have a good chance of recovery if they have plenty of fresh air, good food and abundant rest. But physical rest is little use unless they can find peace of mind. One of our regular worshippers who once made a spectacular recovery from an extreme form of this disease, told me that while he lay in bed thinking of the need for good food it occurred to him that he needed "food for thought". Accordingly he began to make a list of the promises in the Bible. The promise which helped him most was the word spoken by Jesus to the father of the epileptic, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

At one time during the war my Air Force unit was moved to the Admiralty Islands just two degrees south of the equator in the Pacific. As we settled in, the guns were booming over our heads. For several nights enemy patrols moved through our camps. With extraordinary courage American construction units worked on the airstrips night and day with snipers shooting at them. The motto of one of these battalions was painted proudly across their headquarters hut, WE SPECIALIZE IN THE DIFFICULT, THE IMPOSSIBLE TAKES A LITTLE LONGER. They had a wonderful spirit with faith in their outfit and faith in their Cause. It nerved them to do great things. Confronted by similar dangers and difficulties there were others who said, "It can't be done."

They allowed the mental and spiritual mountains to overwhelm them.

May God increase our faith, especially faith in Himself and what He can do through us. Then will the mountains of difficulty in the mind be dissolved away. Through faith we shall conquer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Turn the Other Cheek

Matthew 5:39

“Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. If some-one slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left.” (N.E.B.)

“That is no good to me,” says the man of the world. “If somebody hits me on the right cheek, he is going to get it back with interest! It is weakness to let people get away with things like that.”

Once I heard a small boy come to his father and tell him that another boy had hit him. The boy was whimpering. His father said, “How many times have I told you, if another boy hits you, hit him back twice as hard!”

The world says it is weak to turn the other cheek. Worse, it encourages the bully to go on with his evil. Yet this teaching of Jesus is quite plain. How then can we explain it?

Later I want to show that the positive side of His teaching has immense practical value in three different directions, but let us clear up some of the difficulties. To start with, is it really a weak thing to turn the other cheek? The weak thing, surely, would be to run away. Anybody can hit back. The primitive instinct of self-defence makes us do that. But is that the wisest or the best thing to do, even from the point of view of self-interest? It takes considerable self-control and

not a little courage to turn the other cheek. Only a really big person can do that.

Once again, this difficult saying of Jesus must be understood in the light of the thought-forms He used and against the local and historical Eastern background. For one thing the kind of blow Jesus was speaking of here is rather different from what we might describe as a good honest punch on the jaw. As the New English Bible makes clear Jesus is speaking not of a punch, but of a slap on the right cheek, and that had special significance to His audience. If you slap a man on the right cheek with your own right hand, the only way you can do it is with the back of the hand and to the Easterner that is a terrible insult. In other words Jesus was talking primarily about injuries to our pride.

Not only that, but Jesus was contrasting His teaching with the rule by which they had lived for centuries, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This *lex talionis* as it was known is believed to be the oldest law ever recorded. It goes back to Hammurabi of Babylon who reigned one thousand seven hundred years before Christ. While it sounds a blood-thirsty law, it was, in fact, the opposite. Previously if a man had his eye or a tooth knocked out, he did not rest until he had knocked out both eyes of his enemy or all his teeth. Worse still the whole tribe was likely to be involved and a feud with the other man's tribe could lead to much bloodshed and even war. The *lex talionis* was meant to restrict retaliation to one eye for one eye, one tooth for one tooth. In practice it soon developed into a system of monetary damages such as we have today. It was a good law, but Jesus introduced an even better one at a higher moral and spiritual level.

Jesus taught that in spite of the proverb, revenge is not

sweet. It leads to increasing bitterness and ultimately more harm to ourselves. He lifts us to the point of seeking the welfare of our enemy even before our own. He challenges us to an attitude of unconquerable goodwill. That is why I think the New English Bible translation of the words "Resist not evil" in the King James version of our text is to be preferred. Surely every Christian ought to resist evil. The New English Bible translates the Greek in Matthew's manuscript, "Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you." Just because of an insult to your pride, don't allow yourself to become bitter towards a fellow-man.

Again we can hardly take the words, "Turn the other cheek," out of their context. Jesus went on to say, "If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." The point is that according to the law no man could, legally, take away your cloak, the outer garment which served as a blanket at night. But a Christian is not to stand on his rights. Further, Jesus said, "whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." A Roman soldier had the right to lay the flat of his spear on a Jew's shoulder and order him to carry his kit-bag. The duty was restricted to one mile. We can well understand how it was resented. Jesus said, "Don't resent it. Regard it as an opportunity to serve even your enemy. Carry the burden cheerfully two miles." Imagine how astonished the Roman soldier would be! But what a new spirit would be born between the two races who hated each other with such a terrible hatred! The lesson of this whole section of the Sermon on the Mount is this, "If a Christian does not resent personal insults or seek retaliation for them, if he is not obsessed with his rights, and refuses to worry if some

irksome duty is laid upon him, but rather sees in it an opportunity to be of service, then he is on his way to full development of personality and that abundant life to which Christ calls all who would follow Him.” Consider now three of the immense blessings which come to those who practise the principle of turning the other cheek.

1. REMOVAL OF TENSION FROM YOUR OWN PERSONALITY

I don’t suppose many people today have to cope with the problem of a physical slap on the cheek, but there are few of us who don’t feel insulted or neglected at some time or other. Even as I composed this chapter I received a letter from a man who had gone to settle in a country town. On his first Sunday there he went to the local Church. An elder at the door shook hands with him and the minister greeted him after the service. Unfortunately there was no further follow-up. The writer of the letter feels lonely, neglected and hurt. As a normal human being he will say, “All right, if that is their attitude I won’t go to that Church.” But what will a Christian say in the light of the “Turn the other cheek” principle? Surely he will say, “Well, I’m disappointed in the welcome I got in this Church. This opens up for me an opportunity of service. I can get into this Church and I will see to it myself that no other newcomer is allowed to feel neglected.”

I think of a Churchman who had his own manufacturing business. He was not in a big way and at a time of business recession he was anxious to secure a contract with an important firm. The executive he interviewed was having a bad day. In fact he was quite rude to my friend. The insult was such that he felt very much like saying “All right, if that’s

your attitude I'm not having any more to do with you." But partly because he was a Christian (which helped him believe this executive had better stuff in him), and partly because he really needed the business, he turned the other cheek and next time he got the contract. What is more, he and the executive are now extremely good friends.

In St. Stephen's we deal with hundreds of people who come for counselling because of nerve trouble, anxiety, depression, insomnia and the rest. I can think of very few people suffering from nerves who are not in need of adjustment with other people, members of the family circle or those with whom they work. When people are run-down it is so easy for them to imagine slights that are never intended, or to invite slights which then become an obsession to the sick mind. But the spirit of Christ makes us more concerned to help the other person and at the same time it gives us a growing immunity to insults. If we can build up the attitude of unconquerable goodwill it brings continuous blessing to others, but it brings a far greater blessing to ourselves. That is the way to integration of personality and strength of soul. In the words of the New English Bible the Christian does not set himself against the man who insults him, but he goes to work to dissolve the spirit of ill-will and to restore a right relationship in a positive way. The Christian refuses to hate, he persists in loving his fellow-man regardless of injuries to his pride. Only so can he be big-minded enough and self-controlled enough to turn the other cheek.

2. A GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD PEACE

One of the most remarkable achievements of modern

history was Independence for India. It is a story of which both Britain and India may well be proud. It was achieved without any fighting between the Indians and the British largely because of the influence of one man, Mahatma Gandhi. Ghandi studied to be a lawyer in the University College, London and was called to the bar at the Inner Temple. Some people, no doubt, expected him to be carried away with enthusiasm for the Empire, but instead he was disappointed with British rule in India and worked more and more for Independence. In the same way he might have become impressed with Christianity, but it is said that he was discouraged in this regard when he was snubbed as a coloured person when trying to worship in a Church in South Africa. Though he broke with organised Christianity, Ghandi was obviously much impressed by the teaching of Jesus and especially this admonition to "turn the other cheek". During the Boer War he gave up a lucrative legal practice in Johannesburg to organise the Indian Red Cross. Turning his back on wealth he became one of the world's greatest humanitarians and before very long the real ruler of India. His best friend could not call him an imposing-looking figure, yet he was venerated as a saint and his advice was sought on every political problem. From beginning to end he insisted that Independence had to be achieved and could be achieved without violence. In a conversation once with a cousin of the Pandit Nehru, who was also known as Nehru, I learned that the majority of the Indian people accepted "non-violence" as a policy whereby they might achieve their aims, rather than as a spiritual principle which was obviously the intention of Jesus. Even on the basis of expediency and political policy, non-violent

resistance to British rule proved much more effective than armed insurrection could ever have done. It enabled the British to negotiate a change-over honourably and to the astonishment of the world, India elected to stay within the British Commonwealth. It was inevitable, perhaps, that when the restraint of the British army was removed, centuries old prejudices and hates would flare up. This did lead to some bloodshed between Indians, but it would have been far worse without the influence of Ghandi. In 1947 it seemed that Bengal would be torn to pieces in a war between the two new dominions of India and Pakistan. Ghandi travelled the country preaching brotherhood, the doctrine of the other cheek, and then back in Calcutta he announced he was undertaking a fast until normal conditions were restored. Such was the spiritual influence of this amazing man that after only four days the party leaders managed to reach agreement and Ghandi was able to end his fast. A few months later, on his way to evening prayer, Ghandi was assassinated by a fanatic, but his influence went marching on.

One of those who has responded to the influence of Ghandi with amazing results is the Rev. Martin Luther King of Mongomery, Alabama. As a negro he has applied the passive resistance doctrines of Ghandi to the present struggle for civil rights and integration in the United States. He realises that if the negroes use violence in seeking the rights which are granted them by law, but denied them in practice, they will only bring tragedy to themselves and delay the day of final victory. The son of a minister and descendant of slaves, Martin Luther King has never lifted a hand against white people although he has been knifed and beaten and

his home has been bombed. He has insisted on turning the other cheek, whatever they did. When the "Freedom Riders" arrived in Montgomery and were mercilessly beaten by white hoodlums, the 50,000 negroes in the city, heeding the advice of the young preacher, clenched their fists and stoically refused to join battle. So they are winning the admiration and the sympathy of the vast majority of white Americans. Their battle is being won not by violence, but by turning the other cheek to the many insults which some whites see fit to mete out. Yes, history is being made today by those who have enough faith and enough self-control to practise the doctrine of the other cheek.

3. THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY

A third great blessing which follows from the application of this difficult saying of our Lord, is the extension of His Kingdom. I conclude with three dramatic examples of the way in which turning the other cheek on the mission field has led to a notable victory in the history of our Faith. (There are plenty of examples in the New Testament. St. Paul frequently returned to cities which had stoned and flogged him).

Take St. Patrick. As a Roman boy of 16 in Britain he was captured by marauding pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. Like the Prodigal Son he was sent to feed swine. After six years of servitude and humiliation he escaped, but instead of feeling bitterness towards the Irish, he turned the other cheek and returned as a Christian preacher. He devoted his life to the conversion of Ireland. How could they fail to be impressed by the sincerity of a man who could do that? St. Patrick was successful beyond his wildest dreams and is

revered and honoured to this day, fifteen centuries later, for what he did on behalf of those who had made him serve as a slave, insulting him, a high-born Roman youth.

One of the American aircraft which bombed Tokyo during the famous Doolittle Raid in World War 2, was unable to get back to the carrier and made a forced landing in China. There the crew was captured by the Japanese and thrown into solitary confinement. One of the crew lost his reason. Not wanting more of that, the Japanese tossed a Bible into the pilot's cell. De Shazer was not a believer, but by reading the Bible he came to a vital faith in Christ. He endured three-and-a-half years of solitary confinement, but in the end came out unembittered, ready to turn the other cheek to the Japanese. Indeed he was determined to do something for the Japanese people so he trained as a Christian missionary. In Tokyo he linked up with a Japanese airman who had bombed Pearl Harbour, but who, like himself, had found faith in Christ. Now they have formed a team and they preach Christ under the Banner, "I Bombed Pearl Harbour . . . I Bombed Tokyo". The impact of that kind of preaching will have far more lasting results than all the bombs they dropped in warfare.

No story of missionary endeavour has so gripped the imagination of the modern world like that of the five young Americans who, using every kind of modern equipment from aeroplanes to tape-recorders, went in to take the gospel to the Auca tribe of Indians in Ecuador. They knew these people were the most dangerous killers on earth but they took the chance. It seemed good progress was being made but one Sunday afternoon early in 1956 they failed to call their base on the radio. In due course all five were found

murdered. They were wonderful young men and it seemed a shocking waste. All were married and we would not have blamed their bereaved wives if they had asked the Government to punish the Aucas in every possible way. Instead they have turned the other cheek. Betty Elliot with her little daughter Valerie has gone to live among the Aucas. All the widows in some way or other have prayed for their enemies and sought to help them. Today the Aucas, the people so depraved that they stabbed to death those who only sought to do them good, are being won to the Christ who said, "Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. Turn the other cheek."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Sin Which Cannot be Forgiven

Matthew 12:31

“The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

What does that mean? What is the unpardonable sin? Several years ago a woman was referred to us by her doctor who had been treating her for months for a distressing nervous condition. Realizing that sedatives were merely allaying the symptoms without doing anything about the real cause which he suspected was a spiritual problem, he sent her to have a talk with a minister. As often happens it took her a long time to come out with the thing that was really troubling her, but at last she did.

“For years my life has been darkened by the fear that I have committed the unpardonable sin,” she said.

Then she went on to explain that her father had been a domineering personality who had, on several occasions, treated her with cruelty. As a child she had grown to hate her father and to wish he would die. One day he was killed in an accident and she admitted she was glad. But not long after that she began to have guilt feelings until now they were an obsession with her, undermining her mental and nervous health. She had got it into her head that this hatred of her father was an unpardonable sin. Certainly it was no

longer possible to obtain her father's forgiveness in this world, but I assured her that since she had sincerely repented of any sin she had committed, God had forgiven her. It was her duty then to leave the past behind, and with God's help, live the kind of life He means us to live. The relief which came over her face when she was convinced that she had not committed the unpardonable sin was very plain and she walked out of the vestry as though a tremendous burden had been lifted from her shoulders. I have seen her from time to time since then and it is difficult to believe she is the same person.

The idea that you have committed the unpardonable sin when you have not committed it can be almost as dangerous as the conviction that you have not committed it when you have. Let us consider first what it is not and then what it is.

WHAT IT IS NOT

Most theologians assure us that if we are afraid we have committed this sin that is almost certain proof that we have not. But let us look at some people who were quite sure they had sinned in this way.

Some years ago I was called to a home where a woman was desperate because of the alcoholism of her husband. He could not resist this fearful compulsion and when he was under the influence he would perpetrate frightful cruelties on her and their children. Once well-to-do they were living in grinding poverty because he spent everything on drink. On one occasion when there was no money left anywhere else he broke open his little girl's money box to buy a bottle of cheap wine. As I listened to this dreadful story I remember thinking "These things are unforgivable, unpardonable,"

yet they were not. That wonderful woman did forgive. We eventually saw that man join Alcoholics Anonymous and it was heart-warming to watch him trying to make amends to his family for all the misery he had caused.

Dr. Clarence Macartney of Pittsburgh once told the story of a woman for whom life had become unbearable because she knew she had perjured herself on the Holy Bible. Accused by her husband of having an affair with another man she had, with her hand on the Bible, sworn that she was innocent. It is hardly surprising that she became obsessed with the idea that she had committed the unpardonable sin.

Or consider two classical cases from English history. William Cowper (whose name ought to be pronounced Cooper), wrote some of our most beautiful hymns, "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord," "Jesus where'er Thy people meet" and "O for a closer walk with God," to name only three. He was born in 1731, the son of a chaplain to King George II. His mother, who was a descendant of John Donne, died when William was only six. This tragedy combined with his unhappy experience at school, where he suffered much at the hands of a bully, undermined him in body and mind. He studied for the law and when still in his twenties he was offered a clerk's position in the House of Lords. Afflicted as he was with an inferiority complex, he so dreaded the ordeal of appearing before the House that he attempted suicide. For years afterwards he was convinced he had thereby committed the unpardonable sin and his reason was so seriously disturbed he needed hospital treatment. Yet he recovered sufficiently to become recognised as "the greatest English poet of his age" and to give to the world hymns which

have enriched worship ever since. Plainly his sin, serious as it was, was not unpardonable because God restored him.

John Bunyan was another who has greatly influenced English literature. His *Pilgrim's Progress* appeared in 1678 and had for those days an extraordinary sale of a hundred thousand copies in ten years. Through his books, his hymns, his preaching and indefatigable pastoral work, John Bunyan became a blessing to his own generation and to many succeeding generations. Yet as a young man he was obsessed for some time that he had committed the unpardonable sin. The thought kept coming to him, "Sell Christ for this. Sell Christ for that." He resisted the temptation for some time, but at last burst out, "Let Him go if He will." His active rebellion didn't last very long, but a sense of guilt dogged him for years.

Some of these people came very near to committing the unpardonable sin, but in my view were not actually guilty of it. All found pardon, forgiveness and relief.

WHAT IT IS

Jesus said, "The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." He went on to say, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." These are strong words, surely! What do they mean? They are puzzling to us, but I'm sure the disciples knew what He meant, even though the Holy Spirit had yet to come upon them as it did at Pentecost. They were already used to teachings about the Holy Spirit. According to the thinking of their day this was the Spirit of God which

revealed His truth to men and which enabled them to understand it and to receive it. Because of the Spirit man is able to recognise goodness and truth.

Now this twelfth chapter of "Matthew" supplies us with a number of excellent examples. Jesus permitted His disciples to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath day. In the eyes of the Pharisees this was a technical breach of their law which forbade harvesting on the Sabbath. Jesus tried to show them that man's genuine need took priority over pettifogging laws, but they would not listen. Then finding a man with a withered hand He healed him. Instead of rejoicing that an afflicted man had been restored, the Pharisees "held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him." They were as hardened in their hearts, as darkened in their minds as that. But worse was to follow. There was a man who was both blind and dumb. According to the beliefs of those days he was like this because he was "possessed with a devil." When Jesus healed the man, the Pharisees, who could not deny the miracle which had been seen by so many and could be proved by anybody who wished, now asserted that this strange power Jesus possessed came not from God but from "the prince of the devils". Although Jesus tried to show them how completely illogical that was ("a house divided against itself cannot stand"), they persisted in the view that He was an instrument of the Devil. You see the point, when men's minds are so darkened that they call evil, good and good, evil then they are in a state of unpardonable sin. As they don't realize they are sinning, they don't seek pardon and nothing can be done for them while they remain in that state. They have resisted the spirit of God in their hearts, the spirit which enables men to recognise the truth of God and

to love it. They have resisted it for so long their values are all upside down.

Jesus then went on to illustrate this truth with a parable. You don't get good fruit from a corrupt tree. If a man is filled with the Spirit of God then he recognises the truth, he does not call good, evil, or evil, good. On the other hand if a man for years resists the Spirit of God he reaches the point where, like the Pharisees, he may even regard the Son of God as an evil influence and call sinful His greatest works of kindness and of love. When a man has reached that state and still thinks he is righteous, then he is in a state of unpardonable sin, not least because he has no idea that he has any need of pardon.

We have been speaking of the Pharisees who were so obsessed with their place and position, their spiritual pride and their pettifogging rules that they could not recognise the truth of God even when face to face with it. In the first chapter of "Romans" Paul writes most powerfully of those people, whether Jew or Gentile, who turn their backs on God even though He has revealed Himself in Nature and in many other ways from the beginning of time. Turning their backs on God people lose all sense of moral judgment. Having listed the sins of idolatry, sexual perversion, greed, malice and all the rest, Paul says,

"As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

They resisted the Holy Spirit, so God gave them up to their own "depraved reason" as The New English Bible translates it. We are free to respond to the Spirit of God, or

to blaspheme against Him by rejecting Him. If we reject Him then our lives become filled with all kinds of evil things which eventually lead us to destruction.

Modern illustrations of this principle may be quoted. At the time of Pearl Harbour one of our missionaries in Korea, Dr. Charles McLaren, a brilliant psychiatrist, was arrested by the Japanese and for eleven weeks endured unspeakable conditions in a crowded police cell. Their captors seemed to take a sadistic pleasure in the misery they inflicted on others. As a Christian and a psychiatrist Dr. McLaren began to analyse their behaviour, trying to understand it. He finally decided that Paul described them exactly in "Romans". When men persistently turn away from God and turn the truth of God into a lie, there comes a time when God gives them over to a reprobate mind or, as the margin of the Authorized Version puts it, "a mind void of judgment". They reach the point where they can no longer tell truth from untruth, good from evil. Their reason is depraved and they are on the way to disintegration and destruction as the Japanese militarists learned to their cost.

During the same war I was attached for a time to a certain Air Force base in Australia. As a chaplain I found myself frequently approached by those facing the misery caused by a broken marriage. At one period I noticed that an unusual proportion of these problems came from one comparatively small section of the station. On making enquiries I found the men there had a saying which reflected their attitude towards fidelity in the married state. The saying is much too revolting to quote, but it expressed their view that a man was no real man if he remained faithful to his wife.

They considered it praiseworthy to have relations with other women. They turned the truth of God into a lie. A whole section of men was given over to a reprobate mind. They called good, evil and evil, good. Apart from the awful misery which this brought to their own families, as time went on it was all too apparent that the personalities of these men disintegrated. They had resisted the Holy Spirit. They were in a state of unpardonable sin and they paid a very terrible price.

Recently I received a letter from a middle-aged woman who asked us to pray for her because her physical health had broken down and her mind had become darkened from years of "insane jealousy, possessiveness and suspicion". She described how she came from a good family, but early in life was embittered because of something that happened. Over the years she developed such a sharp tongue that she had few friends left. Every now and then she heard what people said of her and this, as she put it, "Seemed to change me into a demon. Then I let myself go and start drinking". She was wise enough to know that she had allowed a wrong spirit to take possession of her. She asked our prayers that she might be given a new spirit. For years she had been in a state of unpardonable sin because she was not willing to hand over her bitterness. Now she realized her need and was already more than half way to the answer.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

If anybody reading these words is afraid that he—or she—has committed the unpardonable sin, may I make it quite clear that your worry about it is proof that you have not. It is those who think they are righteous when in fact they are

sinful who are in danger, those who don't seek to be pardoned because they don't think they need pardon.

Admitting then that we have need of pardon and forgiveness, admitting we need a new spirit and believing they are possible, how can we find these blessings? The answer, surely lies in the greatest text in the Bible, John 3:16.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

For nineteen centuries men have found that when they came to a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, then they are assured of forgiveness for their sin and a new spirit is generated in them. The Holy Spirit of God enters into them. They no longer have any desire to resist that Spirit, to blaspheme against Him.

John Bunyan as we have seen was quite sure that he had committed the unpardonable sin. He lived in misery until one day he discovered the promise which banished all his fear; the words of Jesus:

“Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.”

You may feel that lets in any careless sinner. It is not quite as easy as that. The full text is (John 6:37).

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

If God has prompted you to read this chapter it means that you have responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If

you are worried about your life and are afraid you have committed this dreadful sin, be assured that your very desire to return to God and to find forgiveness and peace is a sign that God still cares for you. He is leading you back to Him who can always create in us a clean heart and renew in us a right spirit, even Jesus Christ Who prayed as they committed that unpardonable sin of driving the nails through the hands that only came to bless us, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

CHAPTER NINE

I and The Father are One

John 10;30

Having invited members of the congregation and radio listeners to submit sayings of Jesus for discussion in this series, I was delighted to receive a request from a most unexpected source. The radio industry of Australia has a slogan, "Wherever you go, there's radio." The truth of this came home to me when, as already mentioned in Chapter Six, I received a letter from an inmate of a prison just outside of Adelaide, South Australia. He explained that a group of prisoners had formed the habit of listening in to our Wednesday Service from St. Stephen's as rebroadcast on Sunday nights through radio station 5AD. They particularly enjoyed the singing of the large and youthful congregation. In a second letter my correspondent said the men were interested in the addresses on the DIFFICULT SAYINGS OF JESUS and, since I had invited suggestions, could they hear an explanation of the text in John X "I and the Father are one" (R.V.)?

Meanwhile I have had other letters from this man and from another inmate of Yatala Gaol. It appears that in November 1960 a group of Alcoholics Anonymous was formed in this prison and both my correspondents are members of the group. One of them described himself in words which could be applied to many others, both in that group and far beyond. He explained how his compulsion to

drink became more and more uncontrollable until his wife left him. In time he lost all his friends. These calamities only increased the compulsion making him, naturally, more sorry for himself. Here is how he describes his own experience:—

“My mental, physical and spiritual values were just about zero. I was truly a masterpiece of the devil, full of hate, bitterness, self-pity, resentment and ego. When I first came here to Yatala I used to get into more strife than “Speed Gordon”. The resentment and ego would show itself. “Me, good old me, in here with this mob of criminals. I’m twice as good as anybody here.” So I thought . . . The first glimmer of understanding came after some months when I visited one of our chaplains, the Rev. A. R. Jones from the Church of Christ. Through his help and unflagging patience I came to know God by daily prayer and meditation as my personal Lord and Saviour. For the first time in years I began to think positively and know an inner peace which before I thought was impossible. My work improved. I made friends and generally settled down to prison life.”

The letter went on to describe how he dreamed of the time when he would be out of prison. In his dreams he saw himself being a controlled drinker. But then Alcoholics Anonymous came and he realised that he was a problem drinker, one of those people so made physiologically that one drink sets up a chain reaction which cannot be controlled. Now he is “on the full A.A. programme” and is looking forward to a decent, useful and happy future with

his family and other people again. The letter concludes by describing his intention to help:

"my fellow alcoholics recover from the hell and debauchery that is the bottomless pit of alcoholism. Through this transition I have learned to respect others, but the hardest thing was to become humble. Over the months, I am gradually, with the help of God, learning to overcome this defect and most of my fears, resentments, ego and bitterness."

Here in simple, direct, powerful terms you have the first-hand account of a man's descent into the horrible pit, and his return to a happy, useful life. How did he do it? In his own words, "with the help of God". But how did that help come to him? First he was honest enough to face facts. He recognised his need. He realized he did not have the power within himself to control these forces which were destroying him. He had to find some power outside himself, a Power greater than himself. He was led towards that Power when he went to talk with a dedicated Christian, one of the prison chaplains. He came into full and effectual contact with that Power when a group of Alcoholics Anonymous was formed in that prison. There is a considerable amount of group therapy in A.A., but I've never seen a really permanent recovery from alcoholism until the member has grasped four great spiritual essentials of the A.A. programme; (i) humility to admit that he needs help and is willing to accept it, (ii) recognition of a Power greater than himself which he comes to know as God however he may describe or define Him, (iii) a willingness to have his

personality reconstructed on a spiritual basis with God's help, and (iv) the will to share his new found victory with others facing the same problem, to help them out of the horrible pit. Given those four essentials I have seen magnificent victories. Some of the finest members of our St. Stephen's congregation are members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Against the background of this letter, you may understand why this text, "I and the Father are one," has a special importance for alcoholics. At the same time it obviously has puzzled many others who have never had the alcoholic problem. Its real meaning can bring great blessing to us all, whatever our circumstances may be.

THE DIFFICULTY

If Jesus meant "I and the Father are one and the same person" we are in trouble right away. How could the infinite Creator of the universe be compassed in a human body, shortly to be crucified? Did He mean "I and the Father are at one," being united in intention and spirit and motive? We think of the Three Musketeers who were "All for one and one for all." But if Jesus meant only this, why did His hearers consider it such awful blasphemy and take up stones to kill Him? We have plenty of people who assure us that they feel completely at one with God and are sure they are doing His will. Sometimes they are obviously hypocrites and this is odious, but if they are sincere we admire them. They are saintly people whose lives bring blessing, and even the enemies of Jesus that day tacitly admitted He was doing good deeds. It wasn't for His good deeds they intended to stone Him but because, so they said, He being a man made

Himself a god. (See The New English Bible.) It was because Jesus was claiming some kind of divinity that they were frightened and angry. They were sure He was the son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, and they could not believe He was the revelation of the infinite and holy God.

These words, "I and the Father are one" were a great difficulty to His hearers, and they have been a great difficulty to many sincere Christians ever since. This chapter would grow into several volumes if I were to trace the debates which went on in the councils of the Church down the centuries concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and the exact relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Round about 215 AD Sabellius said there were not three persons in the Godhead, but one divine Person or Essence manifesting Himself in three successive aspects. A century later in Alexandria, Arius was maintaining that Jesus Christ the Son was in some sense inferior to God the Father, having been created by Him. It was the Latin translation of our text which was used to refute both heresies. The last two words of "I and the Father are one" in Latin read *unum sumus* and there was an ancient saying in the Church, *Per sumus refutatur Sabellius, per unum Arius* which means "By the word 'are' Sabellius is refuted and by the word 'one', Arius is refuted." I mention this as just one proof that the ideas involved in this saying of Jesus are by no means a new-found difficulty, but they have been troubling thinking people for nineteen hundred years. We must face the fact that our human minds are not built to cope with thoughts which involve infinitude and other attributes of God. We can only know Him by faith. Reason has its place, but in the end the Christian must have reason, plus faith, plus love to know God.

THE EXPLANATION

I cannot offer anything like a complete explanation of our text, but the immediate context does clarify it a little. It stresses a great truth which is not only of considerable value to those battling with the problem of alcoholism, but to every one of us attempting to fight the good fight against evil within and without. The key word is the word "power".

In the Greek Jesus said "I and the Father are *hen*"—that is one in essence. When His enemies took up stones to slay Him Jesus said, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" Not long before He had healed a blind man. Before that they had a similar argument when He healed a paralysed man at the Pool of Bethesda. Where did He get this amazing power? It was His because He was one with the Father—it was God's power He was using to heal others. When the Jews said, "But you are making yourself out to be a god," Jesus reminded them that there is a text in the 82nd Psalm which reads, "I have said, Ye are gods." The full text goes on, "and all of you are children of the most High". Now put beside that John 1:12 "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." When we are one with God, then God's power—the power greater than ourselves—flows to us and through us to others. Writing to the Philippians Paul put it this way, as translated in the New English Bible, "It is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed." When we remove the things which block the flow of God's power into our personality—the biggest thing in the way is our own ego—then, when we are willing, God, Who always respects our freedom of will, enters to rebuild our per-

sonality and to bring a peace and a joy and a power which the world can never give.

THE APPLICATION

If any proof were needed of the truth of this I have only to refer you back to the letter from the alcoholic at the beginning of this chapter. Lest you should feel he has yet to prove himself outside prison when confronted with temptation, may I say that one of my closest friends in Melbourne was the famous Tom, an early member of the Alcoholics Anonymous group in that city? Tom had been a vaudeville comedian and a very successful one until alcohol destroyed him. He finished up in prison not once, but two hundred times. Not only that, but he had to be sent for treatment to seven different mental hospitals! One day in prison he read the A.A. "Big Book", as it is called, and, coming out, he immediately sought for the newly-formed A.A. group then meeting in my vestry. His recovery was remarkable and in a short time he was being noticed as one of the best-groomed men in the city. He married a Methodist Church Sister and to this day fourteen years later remains a shining example of what can happen when a man is willing to let the Power greater than himself work in his own personality.

I conclude with a very different story. Recently I had occasion to study the life of the negro scientist, George Washington Carver. His parents were slaves. As they were owned by different masters they were compelled to live apart so that George never knew his father. In fact he never really knew his mother because when he was a baby she was captured one evening by Night Riders who disappeared into the darkness with her. The abandoned baby was so

sickly no-one thought he would survive, but a kindly Lutheran woman managed to rear him. At the age of ten he was allowed to wander off alone in the world to find some kind of schooling. Other foster parents took him up for different periods, but there was never anything secure about the arrangements and these foster parents would disappear from his life, leaving him to fend for himself once more utterly alone. If ever you had the making of a delinquent you had it there. Nine out of ten boys treated like that would have reacted violently against society, but not George Washington Carver who became the gentlest of men, and a very brilliant scientist whose discoveries in the field of plant life and crops have added billions of dollars to the wealth of America and the world. Every human personality needs love and security and very early in his life, in spite of the awful tragedies which threatened to blast his happiness and development, George Washington Carver, discovered the spiritual answer to these two great needs of his soul. His earliest memories were of his foster father reading from a big old family Bible. Words which impressed themselves on his mind in those days were,

The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein. (Psalm 24)

Even with no roof over his head the negro boy never felt homeless again. One wonderful day Farmer Carver took young George to visit Monsieur Jaeger, a Swiss, who had been carrying on some famous experiments with vines. He was so big and impressive George thought

he must be God. Monsieur Jaeger sensed the awe in the little negro boy and bending down said to him,

"You see the hills and all the fields . . . they belong to the good God . . . all the earth belongs to God. This God—this great God—is your Father."

The little negro boy's eyes opened wider than ever. The big man went on,

"Yes, you are one of His little creatures. He has given you the grower's hands. You too must work with God as I do."

From then on George Washington Carver wandered without fear all through the world, because it was God's world and God was his Father. There was a sense in which he could say quite reverently "I and the Father are one." As a scientist he realised that the cotton fields of America on which so many coloured people were dependent for their employment were being ruined by lack of crop rotation. Peanuts were the best thing to rest the cotton fields, but what could you do with peanuts? As usual he went off and asked God about it. The story goes that he held a peanut in the palm of his hand and said, "Mr. Creator, what's in that peanut?" The Creator answered and said, "You have brains, you go and find out." So George Washington Carver went back to his microscopes and scientific equipment and God who "works in us inspiring both the will and the deed," led George Washington Carver to find three hundred commercial

uses for the humble peanut. That negro scientist didn't attempt to solve all his problems himself. Nor did he just pray and expect God to solve all the problems. He worked with God. He allowed the Power greater than himself to work through him. Above all he found the love and security and peace which comes to all those who can say humbly and reverently,

"I and the Father are one."

There is a very special sense in which these words are true of Jesus Christ, but He Himself taught that every sincere believer could, at least to some extent, enter into this experience.

CHAPTER TEN

Except Ye Eat My Flesh

John 6:53

“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”

Is it any wonder the disciples said, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” The New English Bible translates their response more bluntly: “This is more than we can stomach! Why listen to such words?”

It is a hard saying to us because the very idea is revolting in the extreme. It was a particularly hard saying to the Jews because the one thing they abominated above all others was the drinking of blood. They were terrified of it because to them blood was the life of the animal or the man concerned and there were ancient taboos attached to it going right back to the law of Moses and beyond.

Even though we attempt to accept the possibility of the literal act we are faced with all kinds of overwhelming difficulties from this very passage of Scripture. Jesus Himself said, “The flesh profiteth nothing.” (v. 63). Again He said (v. 58) “He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” Nobody has lived for ever on this earth. Nor is there any record of anybody literally eating the flesh of Christ or drinking His blood. Without pressing the point this is clearly another physical impossibility. It has to be understood spiritually.

May I say quite frankly that in attempting to plumb the spiritual depths of this profound teaching, I feel most inadequate? In what follows I am indebted to the late Archbishop Temple (*Readings in St. John's Gospel*), Sir Edwyn Hoskyns (*The Fourth Gospel*), my old teacher in Glasgow, G. H. C. MacGregor (*The Moffatt Commentary on John*), Professor A. D. Garvie, Dr. William Barclay (*The Gospel of John*), George Lamsa (*Gospel Light from Aramaic*), and several others. While they do much to clarify the problem, I am always left with the conviction that yet much remains to be understood. In other words we are face to face with divine mystery which ultimately we accept (or reject!) by faith. No human thoughts or words are adequate finally to analyse all that Jesus meant here. Indeed that is why He gave us the Communion Service that through faith quickened by this acted parable we may discover the reality of the experience which, when He described it in ordinary words, simply shocked His hearers.

PART OF THE EXPLANATION

Once more I turned back to the Aramaic-speaking Lamsa to see if there is some idiom which may unlock the mystery, and I was not disappointed. He says the Semitic people have the strange expression, "I have eaten my body and drunk my blood," meaning "I have worked to the point of exhaustion." We say, "I am all used up" or, "I am utterly spent." Jesus frequently worked Himself to this point of utter exhaustion. So He gave Himself to men.

Once more I would remind you that we ourselves have everyday expressions involving blood, the flesh and the heart which if taken quite literally are crude and revolting. We

talk of a miserly man being a "blood-sucker". We refer to the "flesh creeping". When it comes to the heart we have all kinds of weird expressions. In my rowing days, when we had a hard race, we said we "pulled our hearts out". We often hear of people who say their "heart is broken" and when it is, they "cry their hearts out". Many stories are "heart-rending". It is always important with these idioms to close the mind to the literal meaning and think only of the intended meaning in the total situation.

To return to the sixth chapter of John which contains our present difficult saying, it is in this same passage that Jesus speaks of Himself as being the "bread of life". To Eastern people bread, the staff of life, is sacred. They make oaths by touching it or kissing it. Friends show their friendship by eating bread together, while enemies, when they are reconciled, demonstrate that the hatchets are buried by sharing bread. Another important custom was this; when a refugee sought asylum in another man's house and was invited to eat his bread, his host was then bound to defend his guest at any cost, even with his life. In other words, bread was the symbol of sacred covenants between men. The more there was love, loyalty, honour and an undertaking to stand by one another, the more certain bread was to come into the picture at some point.

In seeking an explanation of this difficult saying, "Except ye eat my flesh", we must think not only of strange expressions and customs, but consider also thought-forms which are unfamiliar to us. For many centuries the Jews had practised animal sacrifice in their worship. Because of the insight given to Abraham, human sacrifice had been abolished, but animal sacrifice continued on. Why

did they do it? It began with the primitive idea that man had to appease the angry gods, otherwise misfortune would come to him. When an animal was burned on an altar the smoke rose to heaven and it was thought that the god thereby received the gift of good food. Not only that but animals were practically their only possessions, and usually their most precious possessions. Men gave to their gods that which cost them dearly. By the time of our Lord it was the custom to divide the sacrificial animal into three parts. One part remained on the altar for God, one part was given to the priests and the rest was food for the worshipper and his family. As the animal was presented on the altar they believed the Spirit of God entered the animal and when the animal was eaten the Spirit of God then entered the worshipper. Christianity abolished animal sacrifice, but the people to whom Jesus spoke were still thinking in these terms, using these thought-forms, and it may help us to bear these things in mind as we turn to the spiritual significance of His words, "Except ye eat my flesh", remembering especially that in due course He offered Himself a sacrifice for sin.

THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

Let us consider the spiritual significance of this Difficult Saying by the parable involved in the words, "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). What does bread do? It gives life, it sustains life and it satisfies.

We speak of bread being the staff of life. While it may not create life, it is so important to the body (as it has been since before the dawn of history) we think of it as giving life. It can't give life until it is eaten, taken into the system. So

when the Spirit of Jesus Christ is received by faith into the human soul, spiritual life is born. "I am the bread of life," He said.

Again bread energizes and it sustains. Here we think not only of the Spirit of Christ but of His words. In this same passage He said (v. 63):

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Because of the hard saying which is the theme of this chapter, a number of disciples left off following Jesus and He asked Peter if he also was tempted to go. Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." It is extraordinary the power of words. I used to have a friend who had a bad habit of greeting me by saying, "My goodness, you are looking tired." In one minute flat I would feel exhausted. On the other hand I think of those who have a capacity to say the word which puts new heart into you and sends you singing on your way. The words themselves are just words, but the spirit behind them means so much. By what words do you live? By whose words do you live? We have those who come for counselling who quote their doctors as though a man with a medical degree thereby is the quintessence of all wisdom and infallibility. (Incidentally I never undermine this attitude in a sick person because faith in the doctor is more than half the battle if health is to be regained, but I sometimes marvel at how much faith they have in a human being and how little faith they have in God.) There are others who have faith in the words of their fathers, or their mothers, or some

admired friends. Such teachings may or may not be sound, but these people mould their lives on their words. How much better to mould your life on the words of Jesus Christ.

“The words that I speak unto you,” He said, “they are spirit and they are life.”

The wrong words, the wrong thoughts can undermine the strength of the spirit—as well as the mind and the body. On the other hand the right words, the right thoughts continually build up strength. Therefore let us be positive-minded and keep the mind filled with the things which are true and honest and just, pure, lovely and of good report.

Again, bread is satisfying. It is something we take for granted, yet how wonderfully satisfying bread can be. Most of us, I suppose, at some time or another have been recommended to go on a diet. I was some years ago and in particular I was taken off carbo-hydrates which meant little or no bread. Not till that day did I realise what a wonderful treat a slice of bread and butter can be. I am glad to say my diet did not last any longer than most diets do. The body craves for bread, and the soul craves for that which satisfies its hunger. Every true Christian believer knows the truth of our Lord’s words, “I am the bread of life.” Professor Henry Drummond’s favourite hymn was the one written by an anonymous poet:—

“Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me!
There’s love, and life and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus found in Thee.”

Yes, His words are satisfying because they are truth. But still more is He satisfying because ultimately we need more than truth to satisfy the soul, we need love. He offers His love. He offers Himself, His personality to us and as we partake of His personality by faith so we partake of eternal life —life at the spiritual level which is independent of physical death. As Baron von Hugel put it, “The Christian life is not imitation of Christ, it is participation in Christ.”

IN COMMUNION WE PARTAKE OF THE BREAD OF LIFE

Many theologians believe that the whole of the sixth chapter of John was pointing forward to the institution of Holy Communion and cannot be understood apart from it. It is in this chapter that Jesus said,

“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.”

(That is, no spiritual life.) In the Upper Room He said,

“This is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me.”

If sacrifice was needed to bring man back to God and put things right between God and man then Jesus offered Himself as that supreme sacrifice, flesh and blood. Just as worshippers ate the animals which had been slaughtered and dedicated on the altar of the Temple, believing that thereby the spirit of God would enter into them, so Jesus invites them to think of Himself as the all-sufficient sacrifice. They cannot eat of His flesh literally, but they can take to themselves His spiritual personality by faith.)

To help this act of faith Jesus provided the symbols of the bread and wine. As Archbishop Temple says, religion otherwise would become too vague and theoretical. The sacrament provides a "cutting edge". It brings us face to face with the sacrifice of Christ—what it cost Him to redeem us, the immensity of His love for us. Love needs physical tokens. It is not enough to adore at a distance. The touch of a hand means so much, a kiss much more so. I can never look up at a D.C.3 in the sky without thinking of what these aeroplanes meant to us in the islands during the war. We were all homesick. These were the planes which brought our mail, sometimes after an interval of weeks. How we rushed to get our letters! Some tangible proof that those we loved, still loved us. We knew they did, but those letters were so important to us. In the Communion Service the broken bread and the poured out wine are the love-letters of Christ Who said,

"I am the bread of life," "My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed," "This is my body, this is my blood."

Partake of these physical elements of Holy Communion in faith and you will partake of the personality of Christ Himself. His Spirit will enter into you and His Spirit is eternal. It is in this sense that He meant it when He said, (v. 56) "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Except a Man be Born Again

John 3:3

"Jesus answered . . . Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

As Nicodemus hastened to point out that is a physical impossibility. No man can go back to a point before he was born. Some people wish they could. They say, "If only I could have my life over again!" But that is impossible.

The re-birth may be a physical impossibility, but thank God it is a glorious reality, properly understood, in the spiritual sense. A Sydney University student, whose previous life included a good many wild parties, went forward and made his decision at the Billy Graham Crusade in 1959. Writing of it two years later he said,

"Billy Graham performed on me his greatest work. He aroused a feeling of guilt about God in people for whom God had never existed or meant anything. I felt as if I had literally been born again. I was revitalized with a new spirit of enthusiasm".

Today that fine young man is leader of our Church Youth Group, bringing to them a quite remarkable spiritual vision and power. Why is it that people who have had a profound spiritual experience so frequently refer to it as

being born again? If we have not had such an experience, is there anything we can do to make it come to us?

In this analysis I want to adhere closely to what Jesus said about it in the third chapter of John's Gospel. Once more let us begin by asking whether our Lord was using a local idiom. George Lamsa is quite sure that He was and in this case the accent is on the word "local". Lamsa asserts that Jesus used a Galilean or North Aramaic expression which was strange to Nicodemus speaking the Southern dialect. The Aramaic word for born is *yalad* and the word for boy is *yalda*. The expression therefore meant to become a boy again, or like a little child. Applied to Nicodemus it would mean that he, a teacher of the Law and steeped in the old ways of thinking, would have to abandon his conservatism and pride to begin all over again, teachable as a child, willing to learn afresh. It is not hard to find texts to support this explanation. For instance we have Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 18:3 and 4:—

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

There is further support for Lamsa's argument in the saying of the Rabbis in those days about Gentiles who were converted to the Jewish faith. They said, "A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like a new-born child." To them he was new-born not only in the sense that he was humble and teachable again, but he was such a new personality that all the sins he had committed beforehand were now done away. They even argued, theoretically, that a man became such a

different person that old ties were completely broken and he could marry his own mother or sister. There is no evidence that anybody ever did, but such thinking casts an important light on passages of the Bible and especially on this problem of the second birth. These people were used to thought-forms which are strange to us.

In each of the first two sentences Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, He said the same two things about the Second Birth. In John 3:3 the word "again" translates the Greek word "amotheren" which can mean either "again" or "from above" as the margin of the Authorized Version makes clear. A moment later Jesus said a man had to be born "of water and of the Spirit". By water He meant baptism whereby our past life, following repentance, is symbolically washed away and we make a completely new beginning. On the other hand the gift of the Spirit implies the act and the power of God, rebirth "from above". Let us now consider in more detail these two elements in the Second Birth.

RE-BIRTH MEANS A COMPLETELY NEW START

One night at the Billy Graham Crusade in Sydney I was on stand-by duty for counselling. Out of the darkness behind me a well-dressed man came forward to make his decision. In the eyes of the world he was a highly successful manufacturer. He lived in one of the best suburbs of Sydney. He belonged to the right clubs and, if material possessions could satisfy a man's needs, he would have been very happy. But he was not. For years life had lost its meaning and its purpose. A coldness and bitterness had settled between his wife and himself. He hardly ever saw his children and then usually because they needed more money. For all his wealth and

social status, life was empty for him. But that night changed the whole direction of his life. He made a completely new start because he desperately felt the need to do so.

Here was a modern Nicodemus who came out of the night to meet with Jesus Christ. Why did Nicodemus come? He occupied one of the highest positions in Jerusalem, his family was one of the most important in the nation. Wealth and prestige were his. He was the equivalent of a university professor yet he risked his reputation and, as events proved, even his life to make contact with the carpenter's son from Nazareth. Why? The reason he gave was,

“We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

Jesus was making some amazing claims, but so had hundreds of other people. Again and again some mentally sick person with delusions of grandeur had appeared claiming to be the Messiah sent from God. What made the difference in the case of Jesus? The “signs”, the “miracles”. A few verses earlier John has recorded, “Many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did.” Jesus was different because He gave evidence of divine power. He produced results. As Nicodemus said, “No man could do these things unless God were with him.” So Nicodemus in his great need, because of the deep hunger of his soul, came to Jesus. Be it noted that Jesus did not rely very much on conversions produced by the sight of His healing miracles. He healed people not to get conversions, but because He had

compassion on them. He knew that if people turned to Him because of these things they were still primarily interested in material and physical gain. That was not His purpose. So He said to Nicodemus bluntly "You must be born again. You must start from an entirely fresh angle."

What is that fresh angle? As I see it, it is to move up out of the physical and material level into the spiritual. It is to change from an ingrowing, selfish personality, into an outgoing, loving Christian soul. The former leads to disillusionment, emptiness, frustration and despair. Somebody has said, "Hell is portable" and the end of the self-centred life is hell on earth for the person himself and too often for those around him. You don't have to wait for the next world either for hell or heaven. Those who are born again in the spiritual sense discover all the blessings which are also the fruits of the spirit; love, joy, peace and much else to make life really rich and satisfying.

Any person in his right mind wants to live a well-adjusted life with all these blessings. What must he do? Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water . . ." As we have already seen this referred to baptism. The Jews and Greeks were quite familiar with this custom. It was the age-old form of initiation into the new way of life according to their religious beliefs. Nor was it confined to them. Most religions have some form of baptism. In Tokyo we visited a Shinto shrine and saw Japanese babies dressed in white robes being taken forward for this rite. No doubt Jesus had specially in mind the work of John the Baptist who even at that moment was conducting his mission down by the Jordan and not long before had baptized Jesus Himself.

The keynote of John's preaching was repentance. There is

no suggestion that Jesus had need to repent of sin, but His baptism was the great turning point in His life. The carpenter's shop at Nazareth was behind Him, His ministry and all that it would lead to lay ahead. Repentance for the rest of us includes a change from one way of life to another, but it is essentially a turning away from sin. That is the negative side. The positive side is just as important. As Stanley Jones has pointed out ("Conversion" p. 42),

"Old things have passed away; behold they have become new. The sex instinct passes away as lust and reappears as creative activity. The pugnacious instinct passes away as a destructive force and now fights for noble causes. The gregarious instinct passes away as a slavish subservience to the crowd and now becomes an outgoing love for people. The acquisitive instinct passes away as a force piling up wealth for oneself, and becomes a drive to gather jewels for His crown."

Repentance played a vital part in the second birth at the spiritual level for a man whom I now see regularly in Church. The following is part of a letter he once wrote to me,

"Prior to making this decision my life was one of terrible sin. It was an adulterous and blasphemous existence, not just occasional outbreaks, but daily happenings over many years. I was a smart guy, I ridiculed God's laws, I recited blasphemous parodies about the Saviour Jesus. Physically I was as promiscuous as possible . . . Is it any wonder, having confessed the above sins to God and receiving His

forgiveness and blessings, that I strive to remain a Christian? The peace of mind, the feeling of well-being, the serenity, the love and trust of my fellow men, the desire to help; all these things through my daily readings and prayers are mine. The Lord has opened up a wonderful new life. At last I live."

RE-BIRTH COMES FROM ABOVE

Not one of us chose to be born in the first place. Each of us had an earthly father. When we enter the new life at the spiritual level God Himself is our father. Where Paul refers to the "new creature" (2nd Cor. 5:17), the margin of the New English Bible translates it "a new act of creation". Moffatt in his translation of the third chapter of John keeps the "born from above" thought throughout. Billy Graham emphasises that when Jesus talked about being born again the verb is always passive. It is not something we can do for ourselves. We can and must create the conditions by true repentance, but in the end re-birth is essentially the gift of God. It is by water and the Spirit.

Like many of the rest of us, Nicodemus found this point difficult. So Jesus began to talk about the wind. I like the suggestion that the place where they met was the Garden of Gethsemane and the wind was rustling in the olive trees. Now it so happens that both in the Hebrew and in Greek the word for wind and the word for spirit are one and the same (*ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek). Jesus used this to bring home to Nicodemus the reality of the Divine Spirit. Nicodemus did not doubt the wind he could hear with his ears, though he had no idea where it came from or whither it was going. In the same way we may not be able to

explain the workings of the Spirit of God, but all round us we can see the results in born-again lives.

Look at the extraordinary energy and vitality which often appears. One of our elders at St. Stephen's is a business executive in a large company. The Graham Crusade brought to him a profound spiritual experience. He had always been a good Church worker, but now he really made things hum. From his own written testimony I select these words:—

“An executive position such as I hold is a full time job in itself. Frankly I did not think it possible for me to take on all the other activities in addition, but with God all things are possible. Without His help I'd have cracked up long ago. As it is I have never felt better or happier. The joy and satisfaction from service to Christ is something which must be experienced to be believed.”

Sometimes the wind of the Spirit blows softly and gently over many years to effect the miracle of the new birth, sometimes it blows with great force to bring about a dramatic change in a human personality within a few minutes. We must not think that because we have never had a tumultuous emotional experience that we have been denied the Second Birth as some quite saintly people have sometimes thought. Over the total picture there is probably a higher percentage of lasting conversions when the Second Birth has extended over a period than when it has been sudden. We have all seen trees which have been bent by the wind. No sudden gale has been responsible, but prevailing winds blowing for a very long time.

Even when the turning point appears sudden the full experience often requires months, perhaps years.

In this regard I think of a husband and wife living in one of the most beautiful homes in Sydney. Family relationships had become most difficult. There was constant strain and tension, indeed down-right misery. The husband began to drink heavily. The wife endured the agony of two prolonged nervous collapses. Neither could see any future. Then one night at the Sydney Crusade much to their surprise they found themselves going forward hand in hand to dedicate their lives to Christ. Many months later the husband wrote:—

“So began a new life for us both. Never before have we experienced such happiness as we enjoy today. We feel our home is the nicest place in the world to be and even the flowers and trees in our garden seem to have a new look.”

The wife described her experience in these words:—

“Becoming members of the Church, regular Church attendance and taking part in Church work has been of great help to us. I will always remember Billy’s address on the home and marriage. It gave my husband a new understanding and he has helped me greatly these last two years to find myself again. For me the Crusade meant the difference between mental illness and mental health, a wrecked marriage and a happy one, a return from misery and severe insomnia to happiness and peace of mind. This did not take place overnight. It has taken these two years

since the Crusade to solve our problems and to rebuild our lives, but Billy Graham's visit here was the beginning."

Friends who know this couple constantly remark on the amazing change in their lives and from my own personal contact with them I can testify to its reality. Notice how the husband expressed it, "So began a new life for us both."

You may say, "I would like to have this new life. I can see the need to repent and it would be wonderful to receive the gift of the Spirit. I have often repented of my sin, but I don't receive the assurance of salvation or any sense of power. What lack I yet?"

The answer is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." In the twelfth verse of his Gospel John has written, "As many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God (to be born again spiritually by God), even to them that believe on his name." Belief to be effective must involve every part of the personality. There must be belief in the mind, with the intellect. There must be an emotional response. When we love Christ then all the forces of the personality are focused, the conflicts are resolved and we have a new sense of power if only because our own human resources are released. As Professor Jung put it, "It is the incapacity to love which robs man of his possibilities." But Christ revives this capacity. He is the supreme object of our love. When we prove our love in the way love must always prove itself, by joyful obedience of the will, then we rediscover the ancient truth, "Where love is, there life begins." Re-birth happens when we believe in and receive

Him Who said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly."

"Believe" is an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning to "live by". When we believe in Christ in this sense we realise what He meant by being born again. Once more we find that it, like so many of the "Difficult Sayings of Jesus", is not really difficult at all.